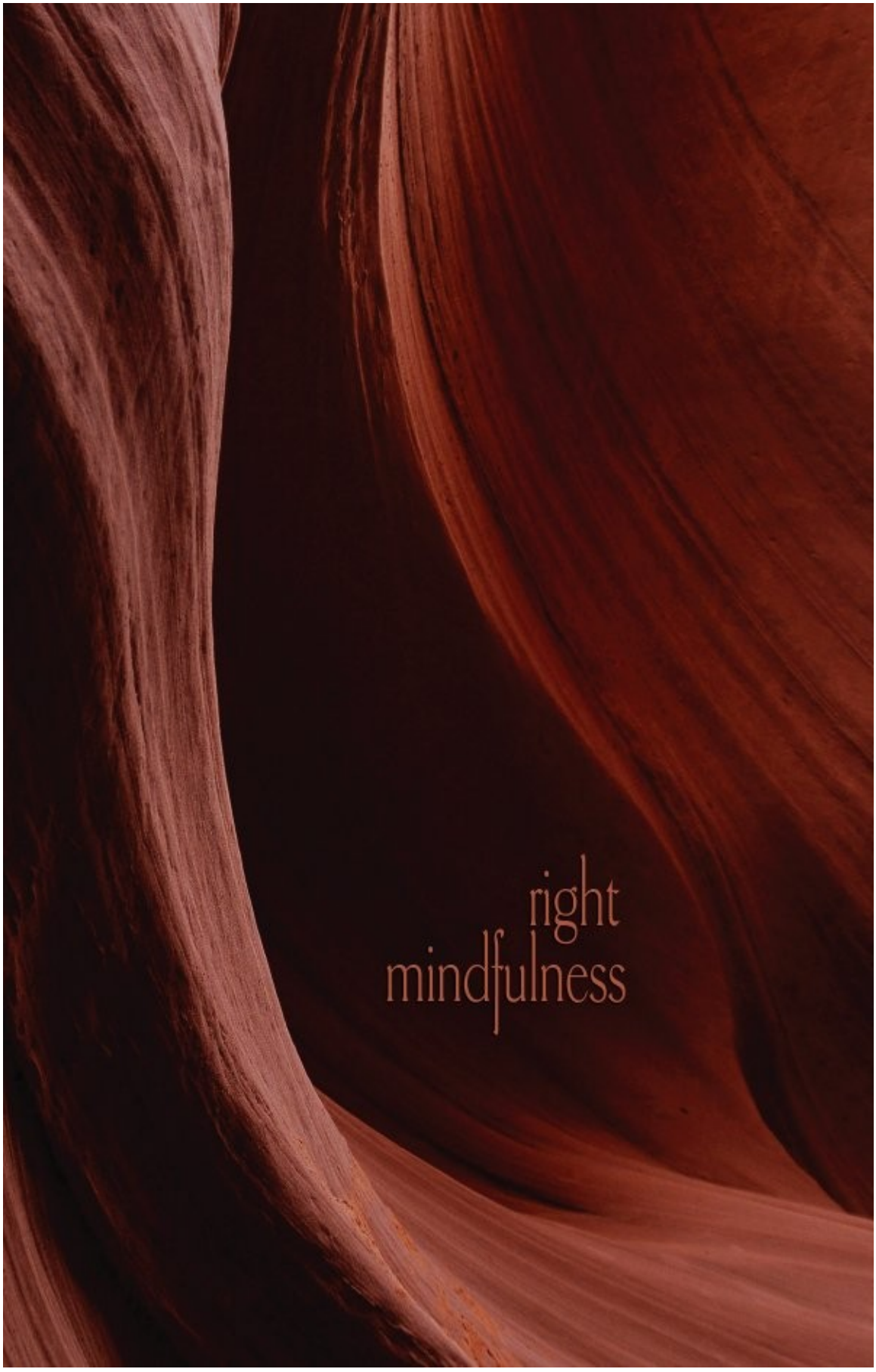
right
mindfulness

Right Mindfulness

MEMORY & ARDENCY
ON THE BUDDHIST PATH

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for free distribution

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"Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper—wise, experienced, intelligent—to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within, and to ward off those without; in the same way, a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering & recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity." — *AN 7:63*

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Abbreviations

AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Cv	*Cullavagga*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Iti	*Itivuttaka*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
SN	*Saṁyutta Nikāya*
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta*
Thag	*Theragāthā*
Thig	*Therīgāthā*
Ud	*Udāna*

References to DN, Iti, and MN are to discourse *(sutta).* Those to Dhp are to verse. The reference to Cv is to chapter, section, and sub-section. References to other texts are to section *(saṁyutta, nipāta, or vagga)* and discourse. Numbering for AN and SN follows the Thai Edition of the Pali Canon.

All translations from these texts are by the author, and are based on the Royal Thai Edition of the Pali Canon (Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rājavidyālaya, 1982).

Introduction

For the past several decades, a growing flood of books, articles, and teachings has advanced two theories about the practice of mindfulness *(sati).* The first is that the Buddha employed the term *mindfulness* to mean bare attention: a state of pure receptivity—non-reactive, non-judging, non-interfering—toward physical and mental phenomena as they make contact at the six senses. The second theory is that the cultivation of bare attention can, on its own, bring about the goal of Buddhist practice: freedom from suffering and stress. In the past few years, this flood of literature has reached the stage where even in non-Buddhist circles these theories have become the common, unquestioned interpretation of what mindfulness is and how it's best developed.

The premise of this book is that these two theories are highly questionable and—for anyone hoping to realize the end of suffering—seriously misleading. At best, they present a small part of the path as the whole of the practice; at worst, they discredit many of the skills needed on the path and misrepresent what it actually means to taste awakening.

The main aim of this book is to show that the practice of mindfulness is most fruitful when informed by the Buddha's own definition of right mindfulness and his explanations of its role on the path. As he defined the term, right mindfulness *(sammā-sati)* is not bare attention. Instead, it's a faculty of active memory, adept at calling to mind and keeping in mind instructions and intentions that will be useful on the path. Its role is to draw on right view and to work proactively in supervising the other factors of the path to give rise to right concentration, and in using right concentration as a basis for total release.

The discussion here falls into three parts. Part One (Chapters One through Four) explores the mental qualities that comprise right mindfulness, showing how they relate both to other factors of the path and to the causes of suffering and stress that the path is designed to abandon. Chapter One starts with an analysis of the Buddha's standard formula for the practice of right mindfulness, in which mindfulness is one of three qualities brought to the act of remaining focused on a frame of reference, the other two qualities being ardency and alertness. Ardency is of particular importance, for it constitutes the proactive element in mindfulness practice.

The chapter then shows how right mindfulness keeps in mind the three aspects of right view: the proper framework for regarding experience (the four noble truths); the motivation for adopting that framework; and the duties prescribed by the framework—duties that ardency is meant to follow. The discussion then focuses on the ways in which right mindfulness relates to two highly proactive factors of the path: right effort and right concentration. Its relationship to these factors is so close that all three interpenetrate one another in bringing about release.

Chapter Two deals with the ways in which right mindfulness is developed through a sensitivity to the workings of cause and effect—a sensitivity that can be gained only by consciously manipulating the intentional bodily, verbal, and mental fabrications that shape experience.

Chapter Three explains why conscious fabrication is a necessary part of the path, exploring the implications of the fact that, in dependent co-arising, fabrications conditioned by ignorance precede and shape not only the act of attention, but also contact at the senses. This means that these unskillful fabrications have to be replaced by skillful ones, conditioned by knowledge in terms of the four noble truths, if the path is to succeed in undercutting the causes of suffering. This fact determines the role of right mindfulness in turning attention into *appropriate* attention, and supervising the development of the skillful fabrications of the path.

Chapter Four explains why the common modern view of mindfulness has to be rejected because it doesn't do justice to the dual role of fabrication: both as a precondition for attention and sensory contact, and as a part of the path to the end of suffering and stress. This defect in the common view has practical consequences, in that it can provide only a limited range of strategies for putting an end to stress when compared to the strategies provided in the discourses.

Parts Two and Three take the lessons learned in Part One about the proactive nature of mindfulness practice and apply them to a reading of the two major canonical discourses explaining this practice.

Part Two (Chapters Five through Seven) focuses on the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118). Chapter Five explains how the skillful act of reading any of the Buddha's teachings is, in and of itself, a part of mindfulness practice, equipping right mindfulness with knowledge in terms of the three aspects of right view. This chapter also discusses the Buddha's own instructions on how to listen to (and, at present, to read) his teachings: penetrating the meaning of each discourse on its own terms, and pondering its relationship to his other discourses. These instructions guide the discussions in both Part Two and Part Three.

Chapter Six focuses on the lessons to be learned from the structure of MN 118, particularly concerning the way in which the sixteen proactive steps of breath meditation are related in practice to one another and to the practice of establishing mindfulness *(satipaṭṭhāna)*. Two points here are of central importance. The first is that the sixteen steps fall into four tetrads (sets of four) corresponding to the four frames of reference used in the practice of establishing mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities in and of themselves. The second point is that these tetrads are actually four aspects of a single practice—remaining focused on the breath—which means that any of the four frames of reference can be developed while remaining focused on the first: the body in and of itself. This point has practical implications for all varieties of mindfulness practice.

Chapter Seven draws lessons both from MN 118 and from other canonical discourses to flesh out the details of how the sixteen steps of breath meditation can most effectively be mastered as skills.

Part Three (Chapters Eight through Ten) focuses on the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (DN 22). Chapter Eight shows how DN 22, despite its considerable length, covers only a part of the satipaṭṭhāna formula—the various frames of reference—while giving next to no guidance on how to apply ardency in the context of those frames.

To fill in this blank, Chapter Nine—in addition to providing a detailed practical analysis of the various exercises and categories listed in DN 22 for each

frame of reference—draws on other discourses to flesh out the role of ardency with regard to those exercises and categories. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the four frames of reference interact in practice, showing how the latter three frames of reference can be developed while focusing on exercises related to the first.

Chapter Ten focuses on the parts of DN 22 that discuss the motivation for developing right mindfulness: It's a path going one way only *(ekāyana magga)* to the goal.

The book concludes with three appendices. Appendices One and Two, respectively, contain translations of the full texts of MN 118 and DN 22. Appendix Three examines one of the central tenets of the common modern view of mindfulness: that *jhāna* (meditative absorption) is unnecessary for awakening. The importance of this tenet to the modern view would suggest that it should be discussed in Part One. However, I found that the amount of space required to treat it adequately would have created too long a digression from the flow of that part of the book. That's why I assigned it its own space as an appendix.

Several features of the approach taken in this book deserve a few words of explanation. The first is that, wherever relevant, I have pointed out why the common modern interpretation of mindfulness gets in the way of benefitting fully from the practice the Buddha taught. I have not done this to stir controversy. Rather, I have learned from experience that, given the wide-ranging misunderstandings on the subject, any discussion of what mindfulness *is* must include a discussion of what it *isn't*. Otherwise, views shaped by the common interpretation will act as a distorting lens, blurring our vision of what the Buddha actually taught and our understanding of how to put it into practice.

Early Buddhists adopted a similar approach when organizing the first two nikāyas, or groups of discourses, in the Pāli Canon. They opened both nikāyas with discourses on teachings the Buddha rejected (see DN 1, DN 2, MN 1, and MN 2), before explaining the teachings he endorsed. This approach served to clear the air so that the main points of the teaching could be more readily discerned. That's why I have adopted it here.

To give an accurate presentation of the common modern view, I quoted passages from the writings of those who endorse it, particularly in Chapter Four and Appendix Three. However, I have not identified the authors of these quotations, for two reasons. First is that monks are instructed not to disparage others when teaching the Dhamma (AN 5:159). In practice, this means not identifying, in a public talk or public writings, the names of people who one feels are misinterpreting what the Dhamma has to say. Second, my aim in quoting these passages is to focus not on individuals but on the general features and underlying misconceptions of the common view. I realize that leaving one's sources unnamed is not in line with modern practices, but I can state honestly that I have tried to find passages that give the clearest and most responsible expression of the common view so as to highlight its salient features. I hope that you, the reader, will understand why I have handled these quotations in this way.

Some readers will find the discussion in Chapters Two through Four too technical for their tastes. For this reason, I have gathered the main points of those chapters at the beginning of Chapter Five, so that if you want, you can

skip from Chapter One to Chapter Five, and from there straight into the discussions in Parts Two and Three.

Two further points need to be explained with regard to the discussions in those parts of the book. The first concerns the range of materials from which I have drawn to flesh out the areas of mindfulness practice where MN 118 and DN 22 give only implicit guidance or none at all. To ensure that the context from which I have drawn these added teachings is as close as possible to the context in which MN 118 and DN 22 were recorded, I have taken as my primary source the parts of the Sutta Piṭaka—the Collection of Discourses—most generally considered to contain the oldest discourses in the Canon: the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṁyutta Nikāya, and Aṅguttara Nikāya, along with the oldest books in the Khuddaka Nikāya: the Dhammapada, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Sutta Nipāta, Theragāthā, and Therīgāthā. Where relevant, I have also taken a few passages from the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Collection on Discipline, as these seem to come from the oldest strata of the Canon as well.

I have touched only rarely on the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, and on the vast commentarial literature that has grown up around the topic of mindfulness both in the Visuddhimagga (Path of Purity) and in the commentaries and sub-commentaries on the relevant sections of the Canon. The discourses appear to predate the Abhidhamma by a century or two, and the commentaries by many centuries more. Both the Abhidhamma and the commentaries use an interpretative framework that differs markedly from the discourses'. So I thought it would be best to look directly at what the discourses have to say on this topic, with a minimum of filtering through later lenses. Anyone interested in studying how the Abhidhamma and commentaries later developed the teachings on mindfulness in the discourses is welcome to take the discussion here as a base line for comparison.

The second question that may arise with regard to the discussions in Parts Two and Three is: Why do these texts require so much explanation? The answer is twofold. First, there is no way they could give complete coverage to the topic of right mindfulness. As the Buddha noted in MN 12, even if people were to question him on the topic of satipaṭṭhāna for 100 years, he could respond without repeating himself and they would never come to the end of his answers. The topic is that large. The second answer is that none of the discourses were ever meant to stand on their own. Each is embedded in a canon of texts memorized by a living community of practitioners who would use them as memory aids, both for teachers and for students. This means that each discourse had to be long enough to convey the most important points but short enough to be easily memorized. To get the most out of these memory aids, you have to take them in context—a context provided both by the collection of discourses as a whole and by the living tradition of the monastic community, in which meditation is learned as part of a teacher-apprentice relationship.

Over the centuries, the lessons taught in the context of this apprenticeship in different communities have come to diverge from one another, sometimes quite widely. To sort out which of these lessons are authoritative, we have to check them against the memory aids provided by the Canon. As the Buddha stated in DN 16, "Whatever Dhamma & Vinaya I have pointed out & formulated for you will be your Teacher when I am gone." That's why the primary emphasis in this book is to discover what can be learned about right mindfulness from the

context provided by the discourses, which contain the oldest extant records of the Dhamma. Whichever teachings in the living traditions are in line with that context can be taken as authoritative; whichever are not should be rejected. However, always keep in mind that the context provided by the discourses, while authoritative, was never meant to be complete. It has to be augmented by living traditions that are in harmony with it.

A note on translation: In some of my previous writings I have translated *satipaṭṭhāna* as *frame of reference;* in others, as *establishing of mindfulness*. In this book I have adopted the latter translation, as it gives a better sense of satipaṭṭhāna as process, and I have used *frame of reference* to denote the topics that are kept in mind—body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, mind in and of itself, and mental qualities in and of themselves—as part of the process of establishing mindfulness.

Many people have read this book in manuscript and provided helpful suggestions for improvement. In addition to the monks here at the monastery, these people include: Ven. Varadhammo Bhikkhu, Michael Barber, Matthew Grad, Addie Onsanit, Nathaniel Osgood, Narciso Polanco, Dale Schultz, Mary Talbot, Josephine Wolf, and Jane Yudelman. Ruby Grad kindly provided the index. I am grateful to all these people for their assistance. Any errors that remain in the book are, of course, my own responsibility.

I hope that this book is helpful as aid and encouragement in your practice of right mindfulness for the sake of total release.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

METTA FOREST MONASTERY
JULY, 2012

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Mindfulness the Gatekeeper

The Buddha adopted the term *sati* from the languages of his culture. It's related to the Sanskrit term *smriti,* which means remembrance or the act of calling to mind. However, there is no record of his having defined the term *per se.* Instead, the texts depict him as observing that there are two types of sati when viewed from the perspective of a person trying to put an end to suffering: right and wrong (MN 117; MN 126; AN 10:108). The texts also show him defining the faculty of sati *(sat'indrīya),* which is equivalent to right sati:

> "And which is the faculty of sati? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones has sati, is endowed with excellent proficiency in sati, remembering & recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. He remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & having sati—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves… the mind in & of itself… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & having sati—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called the faculty of sati." — *SN 48:10*

This definition of right sati falls into two parts. In the first sentence, the Buddha is obviously retaining the meaning of its Sanskrit cognate—remembrance—showing how sati, when developed to the point of being a faculty, or dominant factor in the mind, is able to remember words and actions far into the past.

The second part of the definition is identical with the definition of right sati in the noble eightfold path, and is often called the establishing of sati *(sati* + *upaṭṭhāna* [establishing, setting near] = *satipaṭṭhāna).* This part of the definition sets out the task that sati is meant to keep in mind, along with the other mental factors that have to be developed, and the concerns that need to be subdued, to help keep sati firmly established on its task.

In the practice of the path, sati and satipaṭṭhāna are mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, as the satipaṭṭhāna formula states, sati is one of the factors brought to bear on the task of remaining focused as a part of satipaṭṭhāna. On the other, SN 48:11 notes that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna gives rise to strengthened sati.

> "And which is the faculty of sati? Whatever sati one obtains from the four establishings of sati: That is the faculty of sati." — *SN 48:11*

So, just as physical strength grows by being used in exercise, sati is strengthened by being applied to the task of the four establishings of sati. This has practical consequences that we will discuss further below.

The central task of satipaṭṭhāna is to remain focused on any one of four topics as a frame of reference. The phrase, "remaining focused on" is nowhere defined in the Canon, but the Pāli term *(anupassanā = anu* [follow] + *passanā* [seeing]) is commonly used for two types of meditative practice: keeping watch over a particular topic in the midst of other experiences, and looking for a particular quality in experiences as they arise.

Both types of anupassanā are relevant in the practice of establishing sati. An example of the first comes in the standard satipaṭṭhāna formula. Remaining focused on the body in and of itself, for example, means keeping track of the body or a particular aspect of the body as a frame of reference in the midst of all your sensory experiences. Even when another topic looms large in your awareness, you try to keep track of where the body is in the midst of that awareness, or of how that other topic and the body interact. In this way, the body remains your frame of reference regardless of whatever else may arise. The same principle applies when remaining focused on feelings, mind, or mental qualities in and of themselves.

As for the second type of anupassanā—looking for a particular quality in experiences as they arise—an example would be the practice of looking for inconstancy *(anicca)* in all phenomena. This, as we will see in Chapter Two, is one of the steps by which sati is established through breath meditation.

The four topics to remain focused on are body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities. "Body" means the physical body; "feelings" covers feeling tones of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain; and "mind" covers states of mind. The phrase "mental qualities" *(dhammas)* covers a wider range of phenomena. Its primary meaning in this context covers mental events or mental actions, but it also covers any physical or mental experience viewed as an event. All of these meanings play a role in how right sati makes use of this frame of reference. There is some overlap between the content of "mind" and "mental qualities" as frames of reference, but as we will see in Chapters Six through Nine, their difference lies primarily in their respective functions. "Mind" is concerned primarily with how the mind relates to the object of its focus; "mental qualities" are concerned with the qualities and thought-categories involved in the process of fending off any defilements or distractions that surround that focus or threaten to interfere with it.

The duty of sati is to remember to remain focused on any one of these topics *in and of itself.* The Pāli passage expresses this idea literally by saying, "body in the body," "feelings in feelings," etc., with the locative case—a grammatical case indicating location, often translated as "in"—also meaning "with reference to." In other words, each of these topics is viewed solely with reference to itself, on its own terms, without subsuming it under a larger frame of reference, such as the world outside. Each topic is thus a frame of reference in and of itself.

Sati is one of three mental factors that should accompany the activity of remaining focused in this way. The other two are alertness and ardency.

The Canon defines alertness *(sampajañña)* as knowing both events in the mind and activities of the body as they are happening:

> "And how is a monk alert? There is the case where feelings are known to the monk as they arise, known as become established, known as they subside. Thoughts are known to him as they arise, known as they become

established, known as they subside. Perceptions are known to him as they arise, known as they become established, known as they subside. This is how a monk is alert." — *SN 47:35*

"And how is a monk alert? When going forward & returning, he makes himself alert; when looking toward & looking away… when bending & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe, & his bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself alert. This is how a monk is alert." — *SN 36:7*

This means that for sati to be properly established, it must not only remember far into the past, but also be coupled with a clear awareness of what's going on in the present.

Ardency *(ātappa)* is the desire to avoid what is unbeneficial.

Ven. MahāKassapa: "And how is one ardent? There is the case where a monk, (thinking,) 'Unarisen evil, unskillful qualities arising in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' arouses ardency. (Thinking,) 'Arisen evil, unskillful qualities not being abandoned in me…' … 'Unarisen skillful qualities not arising in me …' … 'Arisen skillful qualities ceasing in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' he arouses ardency. This is how one is ardent." — *SN 16:2*

The discourses often pair ardency with compunction *(ottappa),* fear of the consequences of doing evil, perhaps because the words are so similar in meaning and—in Pāli—in sound. (Here I am using *compunction* in its American sense, as a twinge of scrupulous conscience *prior* to doing wrong.) Working together, these two qualities find expression in the determined abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities. Without them, the goal would be impossible to attain.

"A person without ardency, without compunction, is incapable of self-awakening, incapable of unbinding, incapable of attaining the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A person ardent & compunctious is capable of self-awakening, capable of unbinding, capable of attaining the unsurpassed safety from bondage." — *Iti 34*

"If, while he is walking, there arises in a monk a thought of sensuality, a thought of ill will, or a thought of harmfulness, and he does not quickly abandon, dispel, demolish, or wipe that thought out of existence, then a monk walking with such a lack of ardency & compunction is called continually & continuously lethargic & low in his persistence. [Similarly if he is standing, sitting, or lying down.]

"But if, while he is walking, there arises in a monk a thought of sensuality, a thought of ill will, or a thought of harmfulness, and he quickly abandons, dispels, demolishes, & wipes that thought out of existence, then a monk walking with such ardency & compunction is called continually &

> continuously resolute, one with persistence aroused. [Similarly if he is standing, sitting, or lying down.]" — *Iti 110*

Ardency is thus closely connected with right effort. In fact, it's synonymous with the desire explicit in the definition of right effort, and motivated by the discernment of what's skillful and unskillful—the element of right view implicit in that definition.

> "And what is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen… for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen… for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen… (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort." — *SN 45:8*

It's worth noting here the centrality of desire in right effort. As AN 10:58 observes, all phenomena are rooted in desire. This observation applies to skillful as well as to unskillful phenomena. Without skillful desire, it would be impossible to develop the path (SN 51:15). This means that the path is not a truth available to passive observation. It's a truth of the will: something that can become true only if you want it to happen. By applying the desire of right effort, the element of skillful purpose, to the act of remaining focused, ardency enables sati to be established as right sati.

Taken together, these mental factors of sati, alertness, and ardency indicate that right sati, as a factor in the path to the end of suffering and stress, brings memories from the past to bear on a clear alertness of events and actions in the present with the purpose of abandoning unskillful qualities and developing skillful ones both in the present and on into the future. In this way, alertness and ardency ensure that right sati points not only in one direction, to the past, but to all three directions of time at once: past, present, and future.

When, in the nineteenth century, T. W. Rhys Davids encountered the word *sati* while translating DN 22 into English, he tried to find an English term that would convey this meaning of memory applied to purposeful activity in the present. Concluding that English didn't have an adequate equivalent, he made up his own: mindfulness. This, of course, wasn't a total invention. In fact, Rhys Davids' choice was apparently inspired by the phrasing of the Anglican prayer to be ever mindful of the needs of others—i.e., to always keep their needs in mind. Rhys Davids simply turned the adjective into a noun. Although the term *mindfulness* has its origins in a Christian context, and although its meaning has ironically become so distorted over the past century, its original meaning serves so well in conveying the Buddhist sense of memory applied to the present that I will continue to use it to render *sati* for the remainder of this book.

A. RIGHT VIEW, RIGHT MINDFULNESS, RIGHT EFFORT

The role played by mindfulness in applying memory of the past to present activities—for the sake of present and future results—is best illustrated by a

passage in MN 117, in which the Buddha presents the first seven factors of the noble eightfold path as requisites for right concentration, the final factor in the path. With each of the first five factors, the three factors of right view, right mindfulness, and right effort work together to abandon the wrong version of the factor and to develop the right version as an aid in noble right concentration. For example, with the factor of right resolve:

> "Right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong resolve as wrong resolve, and right resolve as right resolve: This is one's right view.… One makes an effort for the abandoning of wrong resolve & for entering into right resolve: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong resolve & to enter & remain in right resolve: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right resolve." —*MN 117*

As we will see in Chapter Nine, this aspect of right mindfulness comes under the fourth frame of reference in the establishing of mindfulness: keeping mental qualities in and of themselves in mind as a frame of reference. In this role, right mindfulness builds on right view and remembers to apply right effort to develop each factor of the path.

The standard definition of right view is that it pertains not just to the factors of the path, the fourth noble truth, but also to all four noble truths. And its relation to those truths—stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path of practice leading to its cessation—is not simply a matter of knowing what they are. It's a matter of knowing *in terms of* those truths (SN 45:8). The phrase "in terms of"—again expressed by the locative case—means that right view uses the four truths as a framework for classifying experiences as they happen: knowing which experiences count as stress, which count as the origination of stress, and so forth. One of the duties of right mindfulness is to keep this framework in mind and to apply it to present experience.

However, the Buddha's first exposition of right view in SN 56:11 shows that there is more to right view than just a framework of four truths. It also includes the motivation for adopting the framework, as well as the duties enjoined by the framework. In the Buddha's exposition, the motivation actually comes first. Before introducing the framework, he explains why it should be adopted. It's part of a path that—avoiding the extremes of sensual indulgence and self mortification, both of which lead to suffering—"leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding *(nibbāna)":* i.e., to total freedom from suffering. By beginning with this motivation, the Buddha indicates the role that desire has to play in the path, for as we just noted, all phenomena, even the path, are rooted in desire. In recognition of this fact, he starts with an explanation of why you would desire to adopt the framework of the four noble truths.

After explaining the framework, the Buddha points out that each truth carries a duty: stress is to be comprehended, its origination abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. Only when these duties have been completed is total awakening achieved. So right view consists of three parts: a framework for viewing experience, an understanding of the motivation

for adopting the framework, and knowledge of what should be done in light of the framework.

All three parts of this knowledge are what right mindfulness remembers and applies to the present. It remembers to keep a particular frame of reference in mind; it remembers the purpose for keeping it in mind; and it remembers lessons from the past—"things said or done" by oneself or others—that indicate what would be best to do in any given present situation in light of that frame of reference, taken within the overall framework of the four noble truths. In the context of the passage from MN 117, this would mean recognizing that right and wrong resolve, as mental qualities, fall under the fourth frame of reference; remembering what distinguishes wrong resolve from right resolve; remembering the duty appropriate to each—abandoning wrong resolve, and entering and remaining in right resolve—as well as remembering why it's worthwhile to make the effort to fulfill these duties.

This is where right mindfulness connects directly with right effort, for it directs right effort in light of the three aspects of right view. It remembers the framework of the four noble truths—which, in the formula of right effort, is translated into the distinction between skillful and unskillful qualities. It remembers the motivation provided by right view so as to generate the desire central to right effort. And it remembers the duties appropriate to the four noble truths, which are translated into slightly different terms in the formula for right effort: The effort to prevent the arising of unskillful qualities that have yet to arise, and to abandon unskillful qualities that have already arisen, corresponds to the abandoning of the second noble truth. The effort to give rise to skillful qualities, and to develop them once they have arisen, corresponds to the developing of the fourth noble truth. The effort to bring the skillful qualities of the path—and in particular, the quality of discernment—to the culmination of their development requires the comprehension of the first noble truth and leads to the realization of the third. In this way, the primary duty of right mindfulness is to remember to keep these aspects of right effort in line with the three aspects of right view.

However, there is some complexity in the relationship between right mindfulness and right effort in this project, for these two factors are not radically distinct. Right mindfulness doesn't simply give directions and motivation to right effort, for right effort is actually a part of right mindfulness. This is indicated in the satipaṭṭhāna formula not only by the presence of the quality of ardency, but also by the concluding passage of the formula: "subduing greed & distress with reference to the world." It's worth looking carefully at this passage, for the subduing and restraining aspect of right mindfulness is often overlooked.

The word "subduing" *(vineyya)* is related to the word for "discipline" *(vinaya).* This suggests that greed and distress are not yet uprooted in this part of the practice. They are simply put aside and kept in check. The tense of the verb—it's a gerund—can mean either "having subdued" or "subduing." In other words, the activity is either already accomplished or in the process of being accomplished. Both meanings are appropriate here, in that greed and distress have to be brought under a measure of control simply to start the process of establishing mindfulness. Because they are not yet uprooted, they have to be continually put aside as they arise.

As for the word "world" in this passage, this has two meanings in the Canon. In general usage—as when the Buddha refers to the world with its devas, Māras, etc., or as the world of beings to whom the four immeasurable attitudes of good will, etc., are directed—"world" means the ordinary sense of the world outside: a place in which we move and interact with other beings.

On a more technical level, "world" simply means the six senses, the data they transmit, and the feelings they engender.

> Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "'The world, the world *[loka],*' it is said. In what respect does the word 'world' apply?
>
> "Insofar as it disintegrates *[lujjati],* monk, it's called the 'world.' Now what disintegrates? The eye disintegrates. Forms disintegrate. Consciousness at the eye disintegrates. Contact at the eye disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too disintegrates.
>
> "The ear disintegrates. Sounds disintegrate.…
> "The nose disintegrates. Aromas disintegrate.…
> "The tongue disintegrates. Tastes disintegrate.…
> "The body disintegrates. Tactile sensations disintegrate.…
>
> "The intellect disintegrates. Ideas disintegrate. Consciousness at the intellect disintegrates. Contact at the intellect disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too disintegrates.
>
> "Insofar as it disintegrates, it's called the 'world.'" — *SN 35:82*

Because events known purely at the intellect are included in this list, this second sense of the word "world" covers not only sensory input from the world outside, but also any input dealing with inner worlds of the mind, such as the states of becoming induced by the practice of right concentration. As we will see, this point has important applications in the practice.

Apparently, the word "world" in the last part of the satipaṭṭhāna formula covers both senses of the word. On the one hand, the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world is a way of keeping your frame of reference with, for example, the body in and of itself, and not allowing that frame of reference to shift to the world in which the body moves and to which it relates. In other words, you pay no attention to the body as viewed in the context of the world outside—as to whether it's attractive to others, strong enough to do work, etc.—and instead attend strictly to the issues of the body in and of itself.

On the other hand, the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world of the six senses is a way of not allowing any extraneous sense data to interfere with the work at hand: that of getting mindfulness established and keeping it established in line with its duties on the path. At a later stage, the act of subduing is also a way of overcoming any attachment to the worlds of becoming created by the practice of right mindfulness itself.

So, considering this passage in line with both meanings of "world," it's easy to see that one of the important duties of mindfulness is to remember the right

effort of restraint: the need to exclude any mental frameworks that would dislodge the proper frame of reference, and to exclude any defilements that would interfere with the proper actions in line with that framework.

This point is illustrated by two similes in the Canon. The first simile shows the dangers of leaving the territory of satipaṭṭhāna and wandering off into the territory of sensual pleasures.

> "There are in the Himalayas, the king of mountains, difficult, uneven areas where neither monkeys wander nor human beings. There are difficult, uneven areas where monkeys wander, but not human beings. There are level stretches of land, delightful, where monkeys wander and so do human beings. There, hunters set a tar trap in the monkeys' trails, in order to catch some monkeys. There, those monkeys who are not foolish or careless by nature, on seeing the tar trap, avoid it from afar. But any monkey who is foolish & careless by nature comes up to the tar trap and grabs it with its paw. He gets stuck there. Thinking, 'I'll free my paw,' he grabs it with his other paw. He gets stuck there. Thinking, 'I'll free both of my paws,' he grabs it with his foot. He gets stuck there. Thinking, 'I'll free both of my paws and my foot,' he grabs it with his other foot. He gets stuck there. Thinking, 'I'll free both of my paws and my feet as well,' he grabs it with his mouth. He gets stuck there.
>
> "So the monkey, snared in five ways [symbolizing the five 'strings of sensuality' described below], lies there whimpering, having fallen on misfortune, fallen on ruin, a prey to whatever the hunter wants to do with him. Then the hunter, without releasing the monkey, skewers him right there, picks him up, and goes off as he likes.
>
> "This is what happens to anyone who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others. For this reason, you should not wander into what is not your proper range and is the territory of others. In one who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others, Māra gains an opening, Māra gains a foothold. And what, for a monk, is not his proper range and is the territory of others? The five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable by the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear.… Smells cognizable by the nose.… Tastes cognizable by the tongue.… Tactile sensations cognizable by the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. These, for a monk, are not his proper range and are the territory of others.
>
> "Wander, monks, in what is your proper range, your own ancestral territory. In one who wanders in what is his proper range, his own ancestral territory, Māra gains no opening, Māra gains no foothold. And what, for a monk, is his proper range, his own ancestral territory? The four establishings of mindfulness.… This, for a monk, is his proper range, his own ancestral territory." —*SN 47:7*

The other simile shows the safety that comes when you can stay within the territory of a proper frame of reference and are able to subdue any greed and distress with regard to the world of sensual pleasures.

"Once a hawk suddenly swooped down on a quail and seized it. Then the quail, as it was being carried off by the hawk, lamented, 'O, just my bad luck and lack of merit that I was wandering out of my proper range and into the territory of others! If only I had kept to my proper range today, to my own ancestral territory, this hawk would have been no match for me in battle.'

"'But what, quail, is your proper range?' the hawk asked. 'What is your own ancestral territory?'

"'A newly plowed field with clumps of earth all turned up.'

"So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, let go of the quail. 'Go, quail, but even having gone there you won't escape me.'

"Then the quail, having gone to a newly plowed field with clumps of earth all turned up and climbing up on top of a large clump of earth, stood taunting the hawk, 'Come for me *now,* you hawk! Come for me *now,* you hawk!'

"So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, folded its two wings and suddenly swooped down toward the quail. When the quail knew, 'The hawk is coming at me full speed,' it slipped behind the clump of earth, and right there the hawk shattered its breast.

"This is what happens to anyone who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others. For this reason, you should not wander into what is not your proper range and is the territory of others. In one who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others, Māra gains an opening, Māra gains a foothold. And what, for a monk, is not his proper range and is the territory of others? The five strings of sensuality." — *SN 47:6*

Because one of the first steps of right concentration practice is to seclude the mind from sensuality, these similes show how the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world leads the practice of right mindfulness directly into the practice of right concentration.

B. THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

When we consider all the elements of the satipaṭṭhāna formula, we can see that right mindfulness plays a supervisory role in keeping your practice on the right path: It remembers, from right view, how to recognize the right path from the wrong path; it also remembers to stay alert and focused on the task at hand; it motivates right effort by remembering why the right path is worth following, at the same time reminding right effort of what to do to stay on the path. Right mindfulness also incorporates right effort in its own activity of subduing any concerns that would pull the practice off course. Right effort, in turn, tries to keep right mindfulness established, maintaining it and furthering its development (see Chapter Two).

This interplay of mutual support explains why some maps of the practice—such as the seven factors for awakening—place right mindfulness before right effort, whereas others—such as the five faculties and the noble eightfold path—place right effort before right mindfulness.

The supervisory role played by right mindfulness is in line with the Buddha's observation in AN 10:58 that "all phenomena have mindfulness as their governing principle." Mindfulness—whether right or wrong—is a factor present in any experience where memories from the past are brought to bear on what is happening within that experience: It supplies a framework for understanding the experience, it can remember motivating reasons for why the framework should be applied, while the framework in turn indicates what action(s) should be performed. If the framework or motivation is wrong, the resulting action is likely to be detrimental.

The Buddha, in including right mindfulness in the path, takes the role that mindfulness plays in any experience where memory is brought to bear on the present and points it in a skillful direction. This is an important point to note. Instead of telling you to abandon past memories so as to approach the present with totally fresh eyes and bare awareness, he's saying to be selective in calling on the appropriate memories that will help keep you on the path to the end of suffering. And instead of telling you to watch passively as things arise and pass away on their own, he's saying to keep remembering the need to complete any uncompleted tasks required by the path, and to protect any attainments that have already been attained. In other words, there are some things you have to remember to *make* arise and to *prevent* from passing away.

> "This holy life is lived… with mindfulness as its governing principle.… And how is mindfulness the governing principle? The mindfulness that 'I will make complete any training with regard to good conduct that is not yet complete, or I will protect with discernment any training with regard to good conduct that is complete' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will make complete any training with regard to the basics of the holy life that is not yet complete, or I will protect with discernment any training with regard to the basics of the holy life that is complete' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will scrutinize with discernment any Dhamma that is not yet scrutinized, or I will protect with discernment any Dhamma that has been scrutinized' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will touch through release any Dhamma that is not yet touched, or I will protect with discernment any Dhamma that has been touched' is well-established right within.
>
> "This is how mindfulness is the governing principle." — *AN 4:245*

Several similes and descriptions in the discourses give a sense of how mindfulness plays this supervisory role. In Sn 1:4, for instance, the Buddha compares mindfulness to a goad: a sharp implement that a farmer uses to poke a beast of burden that has become distracted from its task—to remind it of its task, to warn it of the dangers of forgetting its task, and to get it moving. In this simile, the beast of burden is persistence. In the same way, mindfulness serves to poke right effort to change its focus from unskillful distractions—such as greed

and distress with reference to the world—and to direct it back to the duties dictated by the proper frame of reference.

Other similes for the role of mindfulness are more complex. For instance:

> "Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper—wise, experienced, intelligent—to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within, and to ward off those without; in the same way, a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering & recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity." —*AN 7:63*

This simile shows how mindfulness brings three sorts of memory to bear on the present moment. Remembering the need to protect the fortress corresponds to remembering motivation. Knowing how to recognize friends from potential enemies corresponds to remembering the proper framework to apply to a given situation. Remembering to admit friends and exclude strangers corresponds to remembering what to do in any given situation in light of that framework. Actually keeping out the potential enemies corresponds to subduing greed and distress with reference to the world.

Another simile indicates that the role of mindfulness is to remember what to look for in the present moment so that adjustments can be made to help the mind settle down pleasantly in concentration.

> "Now suppose that there is a wise, experienced, skillful cook who has presented a king or a king's minister with various kinds of curry: mainly sour, mainly bitter, mainly peppery, mainly sweet, alkaline or non-alkaline, salty or non-salty. He picks up on the theme *[nimitta,* sign, signal] of his master, thinking, 'Today my master likes this curry, or he reaches out for that curry, or he takes a lot of this curry, or he praises that curry. Today my master likes mainly sour curry.… Today my master likes mainly bitter curry… mainly peppery curry… mainly sweet curry… alkaline curry… non-alkaline curry… salty curry… Today my master likes non-salty curry, or he reaches out for non-salty curry, or he takes a lot of non-salty curry, or he praises non-salty curry.' As a result, he is rewarded with clothing, wages, & gifts. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful cook picks up on the theme of his own master.
>
> "In the same way, there is the case where a wise, experienced, skillful monk remains focused on the body in & of itself… feelings in & of themselves… the mind in & of itself… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on mental qualities in & of themselves, his mind becomes concentrated, his defilements are abandoned. He picks up on that theme. As a result, he is rewarded with a pleasant abiding here-&-now, together with mindfulness & alertness. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful monk picks up on the theme of his own mind." —*SN 47:8*

Of course, the cook in this simile is not simply watching his master. He's also adjusting his cooking to please him so as to gain a reward of clothing, wages, and gifts. In this way, this simile also illustrates the three types of memory appropriate to right mindfulness: remembering the motivation for seeing things in line with the framework of right view, remembering what is significant to look for in terms of that framework, and remembering what right effort should do in response to what is significant.

C. RIGHT MINDFULNESS & RIGHT CONCENTRATION

The Canon contains a number of similes showing that the state of awareness appropriate for the restraining role of right mindfulness can be either narrowly focused or broadly relaxed, as the need may be. This is important to note, because some modern writers—in an effort to draw a radical distinction between mindfulness and concentration—maintain that mindfulness is broad and receptive, whereas concentration is narrow and exclusive.

Actually, this distinction misrepresents the Canon in two important ways. The first is that it misrepresents the relative breadth of the two qualities. As we learned from the similes of the monkey and the quail, the proper establishing of mindfulness requires that you set limits on the range of your mindful awareness. Other discourses show that when defilements are strong, those limits have to be extremely narrow so that you can stay focused on the problem at hand and avoid the very real dangers of distraction.

> "If, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain covetous, with thoughts of ill will, overcome by sloth & drowsiness, restless, uncertain, angry, with soiled thoughts, with my body aroused, lazy, or unconcentrated,' then he should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head; in the same way, the monk should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities."
> —*AN 10:51*

Mindfulness in this case reminds the monk that the need to abandon unskillful mental qualities takes precedence above all else, and that he shouldn't allow himself to be distracted by other issues. This is a time to focus attention exclusively on this task.

Here's another simile making the same point:

> "Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen!' And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life &

> shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there will he cut off your head.' Now what do you think, monks? Would that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, bring heedlessness outside?"
>
> "No, lord."
>
> "I've given you this simile to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body." — *SN 47:20*

These two similes show that there are times when the dictates of mindfulness can require an intensely focused and narrow state of attention, blocking out all distractions.

At other times, mindfulness can be broad and relaxed, especially when the mind is free from unskillful thinking. When the mind tires even of skillful thinking, this broadened mindfulness prepares the mind to enter into the jhānas: the stages of right concentration.

> "And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with renunciation… non-ill will… harmlessness arose in me. I discerned that 'Thinking imbued with harmlessness has arisen in me; and that leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, & leads to unbinding. If I were to think & ponder in line with that even for a night… even for a day… even for a day & night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking & pondering a long time would tire the body. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed; and a disturbed mind is far from concentration.' So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, & concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind would not be disturbed.…
>
> "Just as in the last month of the hot season, when all the crops have been gathered into the village, a cowherd would look after his cows: While resting under the shade of a tree or out in the open, he simply keeps himself mindful of 'those cows.' In the same way, I simply kept myself mindful of 'those mental qualities.'
>
> "Unflagging persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established. My body was calm & unaroused, my mind concentrated & single. Quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I entered & remained in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture I remained equanimous, mindful, & alert, and sensed pleasure with the body. I entered & remained in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant

> abiding.' With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—I entered & remained in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain." —*MN 19*

So mindfulness is not always a broadly receptive state of mind. The relative breadth of its focus has to be elastic, dictated by the strength of restraint needed in the presence or absence of strong defilements.

And it's ironic that mindfulness is often portrayed as broad in opposition to the supposed narrowness of concentration, for concentration is actually the mental state that the Buddha consistently describes as expansive. This is easily seen in the similes he uses to describe the four jhānas, all of which involve a full-body awareness:

> *The first jhāna:* "Just as if a dexterous bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion."
>
> *The second jhāna:* "Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse & fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration."
>
> *The third jhāna:* "Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born & growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture."
>
> *The fourth jhāna:* "Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; in the same way, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness." —*MN 119*

So, to the extent that there is a distinction in the way the discourses represent the relative breadth of mindfulness and concentration, concentration is the quality consistently portrayed as broad and expansive, whereas mindfulness has

to shift the breadth of its focus—sometimes broad, sometimes narrow—in line with events.

The need to qualify this distinction, however, brings us to the second problem with the common portrayal of the radical difference between mindfulness and concentration, which is that—instead of drawing a sharp line between these two qualities—the discourses actually portray them as interpenetrating. Just as right mindfulness contains elements of right effort, right concentration contains elements of right mindfulness.

The above passage from MN 19 shows how right mindfulness leads naturally to right concentration. This point is in keeping with the general framework of MN 117, noted above, that right mindfulness cooperates with right view and right effort in developing the first seven factors of the path as requisites for noble right concentration. However, right mindfulness is not only a factor leading to right concentration; it's an integral part of right concentration itself.

> Sister Dhammadinnā: "Singleness of mind is concentration; the four establishings of mindfulness are its themes; the four right exertions are its requisites; and any cultivation, development, & pursuit of these qualities is its development." *— MN 44*

In fact, the Buddha describes the establishing of mindfulness as a type of concentration and recommends developing it in a way that clearly leads through the four jhānas.

> "Then, monk, you should train yourself thus: 'My mind will be established inwardly, well-composed. No evil, unskillful qualities, once they have arisen, will remain consuming the mind.' That's how you should train yourself.…
>
> "Then you should train yourself thus: 'I will remain focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.' That's how you should train yourself. When you have developed this concentration in this way, you should develop this concentration with directed thought & evaluation, you should develop it with no directed thought & a modicum of evaluation, you should develop it with no directed thought & no evaluation, you should develop it accompanied by rapture… not accompanied by rapture… endowed with a sense of enjoyment *[sāta];* you should develop it endowed with equanimity. [Similarly with the other three establishings of mindfulness.]" *— AN 8:63 (Thai: AN 8:70)*

The mention of directed thought, evaluation, rapture, and equanimity in this passage is apparently an implicit reference to the four jhānas, for these stages of concentration are elsewhere related both to the establishings of mindfulness and to jhāna in an explicit way.

> "Having abandoned the five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in

> & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. Just as if an elephant trainer were to plant a large post in the ground and were to bind a forest elephant to it by the neck in order to break it of its forest habits, its forest memories & resolves, its distraction, fatigue, & fever over leaving the forest, to make it delight in the town and to inculcate in it habits congenial to human beings; in the same way, these four establishings of mindfulness are bindings for the awareness of the disciple of the noble ones, to break him of his household habits, his household memories & resolves, his distraction, fatigue, & fever over leaving the household life, for the attainment of the right method and the realization of unbinding.
>
> "Then the Tathāgata trains him further: 'Come, monk, remain focused on the body in & of itself, but do not think any thoughts connected with the body. Remain focused on feelings in & of themselves, but do not think any thoughts connected with feelings. Remain focused on the mind in & of itself, but do not think any thoughts connected with mind. Remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves, but do not think any thoughts connected with mental qualities.' With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters the second jhāna." —*MN 125*

Given that simply dropping thoughts about any one of the frames of reference would put you in the second jhāna, the implicit message here is that when the establishing of mindfulness is strong enough to allow you to do that without losing focus, it's already in the first jhāna.

So it seems fairly obvious that both AN 8:70 and MN 125 are describing ways in which the concentration attained with the establishing of mindfulness can be further developed in line with the standard descriptions of the four jhānas. As we will see in Chapter Two, this corresponds to a more advanced level of mindfulness practice that SN 47:40 terms the "development of the establishing of mindfulness."

The intimate connection between right mindfulness and the practice of jhāna is a point that has to be stressed repeatedly, for some of the cardinal tenets of the modern interpretation of mindfulness are that mindfulness practice is radically different from jhāna practice, that jhāna is not necessary for awakening, and that the modicum of concentration attained through mindfulness-as-bare-awareness practices is enough to qualify as right concentration. Because these tenets fly in the face of the standard definition of the path factor of right concentration, which defines right concentration as the four jhānas (DN 22; MN 141; SN 45:8), there have been many efforts to find passages in the Canon showing that jhāna is not always necessary for awakening, or that right concentration can be defined in other terms. We will examine some of these passages in Appendix Three. Here we can simply note that, when closely examined, these passages don't support the claims based on them. Right concentration, in the discourses, always means the practice of the jhānas. And as we have seen, these states of concentration are intimately connected with the practice of right mindfulness. Right mindfulness forms the themes on which they stay focused; the practice of right mindfulness, when well-established in line with the satipaṭṭhāna formula, constitutes the first jhāna; when further refined, it can lead through all the jhānas.

So there is no clear line between mindfulness practice and jhāna practice. In fact, they should interpenetrate as much as possible for both mindfulness and concentration to be truly right.

D. MINDFULNESS, JHĀNA, & RELEASE

The path does not end with the practice of jhāna. Instead, it uses jhāna to provide the trio of right mindfulness, right effort, and right view with a foundation for developing all the path factors to an even more refined degree so as to lead to total release.

Jhāna can provide this foundation because the act of mastering strong concentration changes many of the basic dynamics within the mind. As you find more and more that a solid happiness can be found by subduing all greed and distress with reference to the world, your search for happiness focuses less on the world and more exclusively on maintaining mindful concentration at all times. Your desire to produce and consume happiness becomes more focused right here. And because the mind in concentration is so clear and bright, right view can watch this desire and its results more clearly as they occur. In this way, concentration provides an excellent basis for exposing the processes of fabrication *(saṅkhāra)*—the intentional processes by which the mind shapes experience—as they occur within the levels of concentration itself. When you finally come to realize the limitations even of concentration, right view together with right mindfulness and right effort develop dispassion for the process of fabricating it. Because fabrication depends on passion and desire, this dispassion puts an end to all fabrication. And with that, the mind is released.

> [In the fourth jhāna:] "There remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Just as if a dexterous goldsmith or goldsmith's apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up a crucible, and, taking gold with a pair of tongs, place it in the crucible: He would blow on it time & again, sprinkle water on it time & again, examine it time & again, so that the gold would become refined, well-refined, thoroughly refined, flawless, free from dross, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Then whatever sort of ornament he had in mind—whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—it would serve his purpose. In the same way, there remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of space, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine—thus supported, thus sustained—would last for a long time. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness… the dimension of nothingness… the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine—thus supported, thus sustained—would last for a long time.'
>
> "One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of space and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated. One discerns that 'If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the dimension of the

> infinitude of consciousness… the dimension of nothingness… the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated.' One neither fabricates nor mentally fashions for the sake of becoming or un-becoming. This being the case, one doesn't cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, one is not agitated. Unagitated, one is totally unbound right within. One discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'" —*MN 140*

Right mindfulness plays a consistent role in this process—not only giving rise to concentration and maintaining it, but also reminding you of the framework, motivation, and duties of right view: to examine the results of your concentration for any traces of stress and, when finding them, to abandon their causes through the subtlest level of right effort.

In this way, even after they have directed all the other factors of the path to right concentration, the trio of right view, right mindfulness, and right effort continue to work in harmony to bring about total release.

Even after attaining total release, arahants continue practicing the four establishings of mindfulness. However, having completed the path, their motivation for practicing right mindfulness has now changed. Because they have nothing more to add to their attainment—and are now totally disjoined from the objects on which mindfulness is based—their fully developed mindfulness finds these four establishings a natural place to settle.

> "Even those who are arahants—whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis—even they remain focused on the body in & of itself—being ardent, alert, unified, clear-minded, concentrated, & single-minded, disjoined from the body. They remain focused on feelings in & of themselves… on the mind in & of itself… on mental qualities in & of themselves—being ardent, alert, unified, clear-minded, concentrated, & single-minded, disjoined from mental qualities." —*SN 47:4*

SN 54:11 makes an even stronger claim for the concentration of mindfulness of breathing, which MN 118 equates with right mindfulness: Not only do arahants practice it, even the Buddha used it as one of his favorite meditative dwellings.

> Then the Blessed One, having emerged from seclusion after the passing of three months, addressed the monks: "Monks, if wanderers of other sects ask you, 'By means of what dwelling, friends, did Gotama the contemplative mostly dwell during the rains residence?': You, thus asked, should answer them in this way: 'It was by means of the concentration of mindfulness of breathing that the Blessed One mostly dwelled.' …
>
> "For whatever one rightly speaking would call, 'a noble dwelling,' 'a brahmā dwelling,' 'a Tathāgata dwelling,' it would be the concentration of mindfulness of breathing that he, speaking rightly, would call, 'a noble dwelling,' 'a brahmā dwelling,' 'a Tathāgata dwelling.'

> "Those who are learners, who have yet to attain their hearts' desire, who stay resolved on the unexcelled security from bondage: When the concentration of mindfulness of breathing is developed & pursued by them, it leads to the ending of the effluents.
>
> "Those who are arahants, whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: When the concentration of mindfulness of breathing is developed & pursued by them, it leads to a pleasant abiding here-&-now and to mindfulness & alertness." —*SN 54:11*

This means that right mindfulness functions not only as a factor of the path, but also as a pleasant pastime for those who have fully developed the path and tasted its ultimate fruit.

> Pañcasikha the gandhabba: "Just as the water of the Ganges runs together & harmonizes with the water of the Yamuna, in the same way the path of practice leading to unbinding is well-promulgated by that Blessed One for his disciples. They run together, unbinding and the path of practice." —*DN 19*

This doesn't mean that right mindfulness is identical with unbinding—after all, as Iti 90 points out, right mindfulness is fabricated whereas the realization of unbinding is not—simply that the practice of right mindfulness is compatible with a mind that, through the realization of unbinding, is totally unfettered by defilement and free.

CHAPTER TWO

The Lessons of Fabrication

Three passages in the Canon—one in SN 47:16, one in SN 47:40, the other in MN 118 and at least five other discourses—explain how the establishing of mindfulness is to be cultivated and developed.

The first passage sets out the prerequisites for properly establishing mindfulness:

> Ven. Uttiya: "It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief so that, having heard the Dhamma from the Blessed One, I might dwell alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute."
>
> The Buddha: "In that case, Uttiya, purify the very basis with regard to skillful qualities. And what is the basis of skillful qualities? Well-purified virtue & views made straight. Then, when your virtue is well-purified and your views made straight, in dependence on virtue, established in virtue, you should develop the four establishings of mindfulness.… Then, when in dependence on virtue, established in virtue, you develop these four establishings of mindfulness, you will go beyond the realm of Death." — *SN 47:16*

We have already noted the importance of right view ("views made straight") as a prerequisite for right mindfulness. This passage adds to the list of prerequisites the path factors related to virtue, which MN 44 identifies as right speech, right action, and right livelihood. It's not hard to see why these factors would be required for mindfulness to become right: If you engage in harmful behavior, you'll want to forget the harm you have done. This forgetfulness puts barriers in your memory that are sure to weaken mindfulness. A bad conscience can also weaken alertness, as you develop a tendency not to want to look carefully into your motivations for acting (AN 3:69). This is why mindfulness can be established rightly only in dependence on virtuous behavior. At the same time, a lack of virtue makes it difficult to gladden the mind, an important step in using mindfulness to develop right concentration.

The second passage in the above list, SN 47:40, sets a more encompassing framework for developing the establishing of mindfulness.

> "And what is the development of the establishing of mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, remains focused on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, remains focused on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.
>
> "He remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings… with regard to the mind… with regard to mental qualities, remains focused on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to

> mental qualities, remains focused on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called the development of the establishing of mindfulness.
>
> "And what is the path of practice to the development of the establishing of mindfulness? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called the path of practice to the development of the establishing of mindfulness." — *SN 47:40*

Two points stand out here, one general and one specific. The general point is that right mindfulness has to be developed through the practice of all eight factors of the path, including right effort and right concentration. This means that, whereas right mindfulness leads to and acts as an integral part of right concentration—as noted in the preceding chapter—the development of right concentration in turn aids in the development of right mindfulness. In other words, each supports the other in strengthening the path. This point is confirmed by the standard descriptions of the four jhānas, which state that the fourth jhāna is the stage at which mindfulness becomes pure.

The more specific point lies in what this passage adds to the standard satipaṭṭhāna formula: the fact that the development of the establishing of mindfulness lies in remaining focused—in each of the four frameworks—on the phenomenon of origination, passing away, and origination-and-passing-away with reference to that particular frame.

The phrasing of this passage contains two details worth noticing. First is the use of the locative case to express the idea of origination *in reference to* each of these four frames. SN 47:42, using the genitive case—a grammatical case that indicates possession—identifies the origination *of* each of these objects: nutriment as the origination of the body, contact as the origination of feeling, name-and-form as the origination of mind, and attention as the origination of mental qualities. But that's not what you're being told to look for here. Instead of looking for the origination *of* your frame, you watch origination and passing away of phenomena as viewed *in reference to* or *in the context of* that frame.

In other words, while maintaining any of the four frames of reference as a framework for your attention, you keep watch over how events arise from causes and how they pass away, all with reference to that frame. This is particularly clear in the context of the body: You aren't interested in looking just at the role of food in sustaining the body, for that would trivialize the practice. Instead, you watch how the experience of the body has an impact on the origination and passing away of physical or mental phenomena experienced in the present, and how their origination and passing away have an impact on the body. A similar principle applies to the other frames of reference as well. For example, with feelings: You notice how the way you breathe influences feelings of pleasure or pain, or how feelings of pleasure or pain influence states of mind.

The second important detail to notice is that this passage uses the term "origination" *(samudaya).* This is sometimes mistranslated as "arising," giving the impression that you simply watch passively as phenomena come and go. However, the word *samudaya* actually carries the meaning of *causation,* which means that you must also ferret out exactly what is causing those phenomena to

come and go. As any scientist knows, establishing a causal relationship involves more than simply watching. You have to make experimental changes in your environment to test what is and is not affecting the phenomenon in which you're interested. If, for example, you suspect that the temperature of your room is having an impact on your health, you have to raise or lower the thermostat to see what effect that has on how healthy you feel.

Similarly, to keep watch on the origination of phenomena with reference, say, to the sense of the body, you have to make adjustments in your physical and mental actions to see what is actually causing what.

This observation is borne out by five passages in the discourses. The first is that, as SN 47:40 shows, the process of remaining focused on the origination of phenomena is developed by cultivating all the path factors, and especially the practice of right concentration. Now, right concentration requires consciously shaping the state of your mind. Through the process of learning what works and what doesn't work in giving rise to the jhānas, you gain hands-on experience in manipulating the causes of the mental phenomena you are trying to develop or abandon. This is how the process of origination becomes clear.

This point is confirmed by the passages from AN 8:70 and MN 125 that we noted in Chapter One can be read as illustrating the development of the establishing of mindfulness. As these passages point out, you deepen the level of concentration attained in the first stage of mindfulness practice by consciously dropping layers of thought and refining the feelings that result from establishing mindfulness. This requires hands-on familiarity with the patterns of causation at work in the processes of the mind—a familiarity that can come only by manipulating those processes to achieve the desired effect.

The fourth passage illustrating the need for the manipulation of causal factors is the simile of the cook (SN 47:8), which we encountered in Chapter One: The cook has to keep varying his food to find exactly what pleases his master. Otherwise, his master will tire of his cooking and stop giving him rewards. In the same way, as a meditator you have to keep adjusting physical and mental phenomena to provide the mind with just the right conditions for settling down. This can be accomplished only by actively exploring cause and effect.

The fact that the process of origination is understood through the manipulation of causal factors is also borne out by a fifth passage, in MN 118, in which the Buddha explains how the establishing of mindfulness is to be cultivated and developed. In this case, his instructions are more specific, showing the precise way in which his approach to meditation is proactive and experimental. The passage starts by describing sixteen steps in breath meditation, and then shows how each tetrad, or set of four steps, brings one of the four establishings of mindfulness to the culmination of its development. We will consider the full passage in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven. Here I would like to focus on the steps themselves, and the establishing of mindfulness that each tetrad develops. I have put the steps in boldface so that you can easily locate them again when you want to remind yourself of what each step entails.

The steps developing the first establishing of mindfulness:

"[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he

discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' [3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' [4] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

The steps developing the second establishing of mindfulness:

"[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' [6] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' [7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' [8] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'

The steps developing the third establishing of mindfulness:

"[9] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' [10] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.' [11] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind. [12] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'

The steps developing the fourth establishing of mindfulness:

"[13] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' [14] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion *[literally,* fading].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' [15] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' [16] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.'" —*MN 118*

What stands out most prominently in this list of steps is the amount of willed, proactive activity they involve. Steps 3 through 16 are all described as acts of self-training, in which you set the intention to breathe in a particular way and—while consciously breathing—to pay attention to a particular topic with the purpose of developing it in a particular direction. You're not simply aware of what's happening in the present moment, for each training is expressed in the future tense: "I will breathe…" You want to move the present moment into a particular future direction. This is how these sixteen steps develop not only mindfulness and alertness, but also their companion quality of ardency.

Intention in the role of fabrication figures explicitly in steps 4, 7, and 8. The terms *bodily fabrication (kāya-saṅkhāra)* and *mental fabrication (citta-saṅkhāra),* used in those steps, are explained as follows:

> Sister Dhammadinnā: "In-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications. Directed thought & evaluation are verbal fabrications. Perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications." —*MN 44*

This means that in step 4 you deliberately try to calm the breath. In step 8, after sensitizing yourself to the effect of perceptions and feelings on the mind in step 7, you try to cultivate perceptions and feelings that will have a calming effect. And although verbal fabrication is not mentioned by name in any of the steps, the use of the training phrase "I will breathe" is, in itself, an example of using verbal fabrication skillfully. So all three forms of fabrication play a role in these sixteen steps.

The proactive nature of these steps is also clear in steps 10 through 12, in which you try to move your mind in a skillful direction: gladdening it when its energy is low, steadying it when its energy is scattered or uneven, and releasing it—at least temporarily—from unskillful mind states, or from the factors of the lower stages of concentration so as to move it to higher stages. Similarly, in steps 13–16 you direct the mind in an even more skillful direction by focusing it on topics that will lead step by step to full release.

The Buddha was clearly conscious of the proactive nature of these sixteen steps, for he explicitly recommended them as superior to a more passive and equanimous approach to mindfulness of breathing.

> The Blessed One said, "Monks, do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing?"
>
> When this was said, Ven. Ariṭṭha replied to the Blessed One, "*I* develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, lord."
>
> "But how do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Ariṭṭha?"
>
> "Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, lord, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation with regard to internal & external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully."
>
> "There is that mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Ariṭṭha. I don't say that there isn't. But as to how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination, listen and pay close attention. I will speak." [The Buddha then details the sixteen steps.] — *SN 54:6*

The Commentary reads Ariṭṭha's statement here as indicating he has reached the third level of awakening, non-return, where all sensuality and irritation have been totally abandoned. But the fact that Ariṭṭha has to subdue irritation here shows that he hasn't totally abandoned it. In fact, from what we know of him from other discourses in the Canon (such as MN 22, where he refuses to abandon a pernicious wrong view), it's highly improbable that he has reached any high level of attainment. A more likely interpretation is that he's simply practicing mindful equanimity in the present moment, having temporarily subdued desire for past and future sensual pleasures, and having temporarily subdued any thought of irritation with regard to the present.

The important point here is that, although this relatively passive approach counts as a type of mindfulness of breathing, the Buddha does not recommend it. Instead he recommends the more active approach of the sixteen steps. His reasons for doing so relate to issues in right concentration, right effort, and right view: the three factors of the path that, as we have seen, interact most directly

with right mindfulness. We will focus on the issues related to right view in the next chapter, and those related to right concentration and right effort here—although bear in mind that right view is inevitably connected with these issues as well.

First, with regard to right concentration, SN 54:8 states that the practice of the sixteen steps develops not only the four establishings of mindfulness but also all the levels of right concentration. Now, according to AN 10:71, two mental qualities are necessary for the development of the four jhānas: tranquility *(samatha)* and insight *(vipassanā)*.

> "If a monk would wish, 'May I attain—whenever I want, without strain, without difficulty—the four jhānas that are heightened mental states, pleasant abidings in the here-&-now,' then he should be one who brings the precepts to perfection, who is committed to inner tranquility of awareness, who does not neglect jhāna, who is endowed with insight, and who frequents empty dwellings." —*AN 10:71*

AN 4:94 describes tranquility as resulting from the ability to steady the mind, settle it down, unify it, and concentrate it. It describes insight as the understanding that comes from investigating fabrications in an appropriate way. Notice that these two qualities—tranquility and insight—are just that: qualities. Nowhere in the Canon are they referred to as specific meditation exercises. Instead, they are described as qualities used by and developed through the exercises leading to jhāna.

The sixteen steps are a primary example of how this can happen, in that they give hands-on experience both with settling the mind and with investigating fabrication in the steps where you consciously calm bodily and mental fabrication. In this way they develop tranquility and insight in tandem (AN 4:170). As we will have occasion to note throughout this book, a distinctive feature of the Buddha's approach is that he often has you employ as tools on the path physical and mental processes that he also wants you to contemplate and comprehend in action. The practice of gaining sensitivity to fabrication by calming it to promote tranquility, insight, and right concentration is a prime example of this approach.

As for the issues related to right effort, the Buddha recommends the more proactive approach of the sixteen steps because even though mindful equanimity is, in some cases, enough to uproot causes of stress, it's not enough in all.

> "And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not fixated on that pleasure. He discerns that 'When I exert a fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.' So he exerts a fabrication against the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the fabrication of exertion, and develops equanimity with regard to the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the development of equanimity. Thus the stress coming from the cause of

> stress for which there is dispassion through the fabrication of exertion is exhausted, and the stress resulting from the cause of stress for which there is dispassion through the development of equanimity is exhausted." —*MN 101*

Notice that the Buddha offers no specific guidelines for when equanimity will work in giving rise to dispassion and when the more proactive approach of "exerting a fabrication" or "fabricating exertion" is needed. This means that you have to discover from personal experience what works in a particular case and to employ the appropriate corrective. The role of mindfulness in these cases is to keep this range of options in mind, and to remember what has previously worked in cases similar to what you are currently facing.

Of the two main options—equanimity and the fabrication of exertion—the latter phrase appears elsewhere in the Canon in the context of the four bases of power *(iddhipāda),* which in turn are related to the practice of right concentration.

> "There is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *desire* & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *persistence* & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *intent* & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *discrimination* & the fabrications of exertion." —*SN 51:15*

This indicates that the fabrication of exertion relates, at the very least, to the conscious effort needed to fabricate a state of right concentration. The Canon doesn't explain which fabrications these passages are referring to, but there's every likelihood that all three types—bodily, verbal, and mental—are intended, as all three are required to develop strong concentration. As SN 36:11 points out, verbal fabrication is present in the first jhāna; bodily fabrication, in the first three jhānas; and mental fabrication, in all four jhānas and the first four formless dimensions based on the fourth jhāna. This may explain why the sixteen steps of breath meditation focus so much attention, explicit and implicit, on bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication.

As concentration develops, all three types of fabrication are stilled: verbal fabrication in the second jhāna, bodily fabrication in the fourth, and mental fabrication in the cessation of perception and feeling—an attainment that results, at the very least, in the third level of awakening: non-return. In this way, the skillful fabrication of exertion leads to the stilling of all fabrications, and so to release. The sixteen steps of breath meditation, with their conscious calming of fabrication, are a clear embodiment of this approach.

However, the three types of fabrication play a role not only in stilling the mind but also in giving rise to dispassion for different causes of stress. Consciously breathing in a particular way to develop a sense of wellbeing would help make some causes of stress seem less appealing, for you would have an immediate sense of pleasure to measure them against. This would make it easier to feel dispassion for them. Directing your thoughts to a particular topic (as in the six recollections—see Chapter Seven) and evaluating the matter would help engender dispassion for other causes of stress. Adjusting your feelings and

perceptions (as in step 8 of breath meditation) would help with others. In particular, many of the Canon's passages on developing discernment recommend specific perceptions—such as the perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self—to develop the dispassion leading to release. This would count as a skillful use of mental fabrication. There are also cases where various combinations of these three types of fabrication would help in instilling dispassion for still other causes of stress.

Because the sixteen steps of breath meditation give practical experience in adjusting these types of fabrication, they cultivate a sensitivity to and dexterity in the process of fabrication, both of which aid in developing the full range of the skills needed to deal with any factor causing stress.

As for equanimity, even though the passage from MN 101 contrasts it with the fabrication of exertion, we have to remember that it's a mental feeling (SN 36:31), one of the five aggregates *(khandha),* and so it's a fabricated phenomenon. When used on the path, it differs from the fabrication of exertion only in that it requires much less effort. In fact, one of the important insights leading to release is that even subtle forms of equanimity are no less fabricated than mental states requiring much more energy. This point is borne out by the fact that when equanimity is employed instead of the fabrication of exertion, it's used with a particular purpose in mind: to abandon unskillful qualities. This means that it has an underlying agenda, the agenda of right effort, and is not totally free from preference.

In fact, several passages in the Canon—most prominently in the list of the seven factors for awakening (SN 46:53)—indicate that, in the interest of developing the path, equanimity has to be consciously developed through the fabrication of exertion and, ultimately—again through the fabrication of exertion—abandoned.

To begin with, the ordinary equanimity of being nonreactive to sensory input should be supplanted with the consciously fabricated equanimity of the higher states of concentration.

> "There is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity; and there is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.
>
> "And which is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity? There is equanimity with regard to forms, equanimity with regard to sounds… smells… tastes… tactile sensations… ideas. This is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity.
>
> "And which is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness? There is equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of space, equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness… dependent on the dimension of nothingness… dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.
>
> "By depending & relying on equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, abandon & transcend equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending." —*MN 137*

For some reason, this passage does not list the equanimity of the fourth jhāna under equanimity coming from singleness. This is strange, because the standard description of the four jhānas states that the fourth jhāna is the stage where not only mindfulness, but also equanimity becomes pure. Also, MN 140 portrays the equanimity of the fourth jhāna as then being applied to the formless dimensions so as to give rise to the formless attainments, which would mean that the equanimity of the formless attainments is identical with the equanimity of the fourth jhāna.

Whatever the case, even though the equanimity of these higher states of concentration is superior to ordinary equanimity at the senses, it can act as an object of clinging and so stand in the way of awakening.

> "There is the case, Ānanda, where a monk, having practiced in this way—(thinking,) 'It [any object of attention] should not be and it should not occur to me; it will not be; it will not occur to me. What is, what has come to be, that I abandon'—obtains equanimity. He relishes that equanimity, welcomes it, remains fastened to it. As he relishes that equanimity, welcomes it, remains fastened to it, his consciousness is dependent on it, clings to it/is sustained by it. With clinging/sustenance, Ānanda, a monk is not totally unbound."
>
> "In clinging, where does that monk cling?"
>
> "The dimension of neither perception nor non-perception."
>
> "Then, indeed, in clinging, he clings to the supreme clinging."
>
> "In clinging, Ānanda, he does cling to the supreme clinging; for this—the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception—is the supreme clinging. There is (however,) the case where a monk, having practiced in this way—'It should not be and it should not occur to me; it will not be; it will not occur to me. What is, what has come to be, that I abandon'—obtains equanimity. He does not relish that equanimity, does not welcome it, does not remain fastened to it. As he doesn't relish that equanimity, doesn't welcome it, doesn't remain fastened to it, his consciousness isn't dependent on it, doesn't cling to/isn't sustained by it. Without clinging/sustenance, Ānanda, a monk is totally unbound." —*MN 106*

This is why MN 137—after discussing how equanimity coming from multiplicity should be abandoned by developing equanimity coming from singleness—states that equanimity coming from singleness should be abandoned by non-fashioning *(atammayatā):* the ability to not fashion any sense of self or possession around that equanimity.

> "By depending & relying on non-fashioning, abandon & transcend the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending." —*MN 137*

> "But a person of integrity notices, 'The Blessed One has spoken of non-fashioning even with regard to the attainment of the dimension of neither

perception nor non-perception, for by whatever means they construe it, it becomes otherwise from that.' [In other words, whatever the ground on which you might base a state of becoming—a sense of your self and the world you inhabit—by the time that state of becoming has taken shape, the ground has already changed.] So, giving priority to non-fashioning, he neither exalts himself for the attainment of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception nor disparages others. This is the quality of a person of integrity." —*MN 113*

Non-fashioning is a principle that can be applied at many levels. When applied to a particular activity, it helps to pry loose any sense of conceit or identification that might surround that activity. When applied to the most refined possible activity—the equanimity in the highest formless attainments—it brings the mind to the threshold of awakening. At that level, it lies beyond both the fabrication of exertion and on-looking equanimity, in a state of poise that is hard for the untrained mind to grasp, in that it neither moves (like fabrication) nor stays still (like equanimity).

Then a certain devatā, in the far extreme of the night, her extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta's Grove, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, she stood to one side. As she was standing there, she said to him, "Tell me, dear sir, how you crossed over the flood."

"I crossed over the flood, my friend, without pushing forward, without staying in place."

"But how, dear sir, did you cross over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place?"

"When I pushed forward, my friend, I was whirled about. When I stayed in place, I sank. And so I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place."

The devatā:

"At long last I see
a brahman, totally unbound,
who without pushing forward,
without staying in place,
has crossed over
the entanglements
of the world." —*SN 1:1*

However, when non-fashioning is mentioned in the Canon, it usually follows on the mastering of the fabrications of exertion through the development of the factors of the path (MN 78; MN 113). At the same time, as the highest and subtlest form of right effort, it has a purpose: true happiness and wellbeing.

"What do you think, monks? If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches, & leaves here in Jeta's Grove, would the thought occur to you, 'It's us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes'?"

> "No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self, nor do they belong to our self."
>
> "In the same way, monks, whatever isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare & happiness. And what isn't yours? Form isn't yours… Feeling isn't yours… Perception… Fabrications… Consciousness isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare & happiness." —*MN 22*

The progression from equanimity at the senses, through equanimity based on concentration, to non-fashioning shows that generic non-reactivity at the senses is not enough to engender the dispassion capable of uprooting all the causes of stress. To succeed in the practice, you have to *want* to put an end to stress, to actively ferret out the causes of stress—even those hidden in equanimity—and to be willing to employ any method required to uproot them. This is why desire is an integral part of the definition of right effort, as well as being part of the first base of power. One of the duties of right mindfulness is to keep these facts in mind, so as to help direct right effort in its task.

That, however, is only one of the ways in which right mindfulness is developed through the practice of fabricating right effort and right concentration. As it's trained to the point of right concentration in the midst of fabrication, keeping track of the origination and passing away of physical and mental states, right mindfulness provides a steady basis for observing the processes of both the truth of suffering and the truth of the path in action. In this way right mindfulness helps to sharpen right view, at the same time providing itself with more precise memories of what does and doesn't work, so that it can remind right effort of more effective ways to lead to right concentration. Right mindfulness, when part of right concentration, also provides a level of refined pleasure that gives insight the strength it needs to abandon pleasures that deflect from the path (MN 14). With this improved level of steadiness, it's in a better position to remember the lessons gained from the past when they are appropriate to fabricating improved states of right concentration in the present.

In short, as right mindfulness is developed into right concentration, it can more effectively remember to provide information from the past to apply to the present. At the same time, by remembering to provide a solid frame of reference in the present, it enables right view to be more effective in picking up precise information from the present that right mindfulness will be able to carry into the future. This connects with the point noted in the quotation from SN 48:11 in Chapter One: that the practice of right mindfulness not only applies mindfulness to the present, but also strengthens mindfulness for the sake of future practice.

As for why the lessons of fabrication are so important in this process, that's an issue of right view that we will discuss in the next chapter. Because right view is so intimately connected with right concentration and right effort, this will entail looking at many of the same points we have just covered but from a slightly different angle. The added depth of perspective provided by right view—particularly in its most detailed explication, as dependent co-arising—should more than compensate for any repetition this will involve.

CHAPTER THREE

Experience Is Purposeful

Dependent co-arising *(paṭicca samuppāda)* is the Buddha's most detailed explanation of how stress and suffering are caused and how they can be put to an end. It's also notoriously complex, containing many non-linear feedback loops in which events appear at multiple points in the causal sequence, and can turn around and act as conditions for factors that condition them.

Still, the map of dependent co-arising has some blatantly obvious features, and one of the most obvious is also the most relevant for understanding why right mindfulness is best developed through mastering the processes of fabrication: the fact that so many factors of dependent co-arising, including fabrication, occur prior to sensory contact. This means that sensory experience is primarily active, rather than passive. The mind is not a blank slate. Even before contact is made at the senses, the factors of bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication have already gone out looking for that contact, shaping how it will be experienced and what the mind will be seeking from it. Because these fabrications, in an untrained mind, are influenced by ignorance, they lead to suffering and stress. This is why insight has to focus on investigating them, for only when they're mastered as skills, through knowledge, to the point of dispassion can they be allowed to cease. Only when they cease can suffering and stress be brought to an end.

As we noted in the preceding chapter, the main role of right mindfulness here is to remember to provide a solid framework for observing the activity of fabrication. At the same time, it remembers lessons drawn from right view in the past—both lessons from reading and listening to the Dhamma, as well as lessons from reading the results of your own actions—that can be used to shape this activity in a more skillful direction: to act as the path to the end of suffering, which—as we noted at the end of Chapter One—is also a form of fabrication. This means that right mindfulness doesn't simply observe fabrications, nor is it disinterested. It's motivated by the aim of right view: to put an end to suffering. It's a fabrication that helps to supervise the intentional mastery of the processes of fabrication so that they can form the path of the fourth noble truth.

As part of this task, it has to interact with all of the factors in dependent co-arising, and in particular with those that precede sensory contact. These preliminary factors are: ignorance, fabrication, consciousness, name-and-form, and the six sense media. SN 12:2 explains them in reverse order:

> "And which *contact?* These six contacts: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact.
>
> "And which *six sense media?* These six sense media: the eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. These are called the six sense media.
>
> "And which *name-&-form?* Feeling, perception, intention, contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements and the form

> dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form.
>
> "And which *consciousness?* These six consciousnesses: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.
>
> "And which *fabrications?* These three fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.
>
> "And which *ignorance?* Not knowing in terms of stress, not knowing in terms of the origination of stress, not knowing in terms of the cessation of stress, not knowing in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance." — *SN 12:2*

Among these factors, it's especially important to note the place not only of fabrication but also of consciousness and of attention (under name-and-form) in the causal sequence, for these are the components of sensory experience with which right mindfulness must most closely interact. This interaction is fairly complex. To begin with, right mindfulness must remember from right view exactly where these factors come in the causal sequence, so that it can direct right effort to deal with them in time. Second, right mindfulness has to remember that fabrication underlies and shapes them, so that it can focus right effort on the most effective strategies for using fabrication to turn unskillful instances of attention and consciousness into more skillful ones. Third, it has to remember how to apply skillful instances of attention and consciousness in fabricating the path. This entails remembering that, given the non-linear pattern of dependent co-arising, skillfully fabricated consciousness and appropriate attention can turn around and shape the very conditions that underlie them. This is why they can help in the path's fabrication.

These are the classic lessons that right mindfulness draws from right view, in the form of dependent co-arising, about consciousness and attention.

However, because of the modern tendency to equate mindfulness with bare awareness or bare attention, we have to look particularly at what dependent co-arising has to say concerning the nature of attention and consciousness (which is often confused with bare awareness) and their relationship to right mindfulness.

The first lesson is that neither of them is bare. In the untrained mind, each is conditioned by intentional activity—through the factor of fabrication, and the sub-factor of intention in name-and-form—so that by the time they come into contact with sensory data, they are already preconditioned by ignorance to receive and attend to those data in a particular way.

Even in the mind on the path they are still preconditioned, because the purpose of knowledge in terms of right view is to condition consciousness and attention in another direction, toward the ending of suffering. Only when ignorance is totally eradicated, at the culmination of the path, is there an experience of unconditioned awareness. Until that point, consciousness and attention are inevitably purposeful in aiming at happiness: unskillfully in the untrained mind; with increasing skill in the mind on the path.

The second lesson is that neither attention nor consciousness is identical with mindfulness. Consciousness is the act of receiving and registering phenomena; attention, the act of choosing which phenomena to focus on. However, even

though these functions are not identical with mindfulness, they do play a role in the establishing of mindfulness, because they are both related to the activity of remaining focused, in that attention is the quality that has to stay focused on the most important events detected through consciousness in the present. In the case of consciousness, the discourses present this relationship only in an implicit way, for consciousness is not mentioned by name in the satipaṭṭhāna formula. However, the formula would obviously not work without the presence of consciousness. The relationship is more explicit in the case of attention, for MN 118—in showing how the sixteen steps of breath meditation fulfill the practice of satipaṭṭhāna—speaks of close attention to the breath in terms that connect it with the activity of remaining focused and alert (see Chapter Six).

The relationship between mindfulness and attention grows even closer when mindfulness becomes right mindfulness; and attention, appropriate attention. As these qualities are trained to act skillfully for the end of suffering, they both become forms of *anupassanā,* or remaining focused on something. In Chapter One, we have already noted how this happens in the case of mindfulness. In this chapter, we will see how appropriate attention is a form of *dhammānupassanā*—the act of remaining focused on mental qualities—directed by the framework of the four noble truths with the purpose of performing the duties appropriate to the four noble truths in relation to those qualities.

This means that, although mindfulness is not identical with bare attention, appropriate attention—as a purposeful process guided by the agenda of right view—serves as an aspect of right mindfulness.

At the same time, right mindfulness plays a role in training attention to be appropriate. By remembering that both consciousness and attention are shaped by fabrication, which in turn is shaped either by ignorance or knowledge, right mindfulness is able to supervise the task of using this knowledge to provide fabricated—and thus purposeful—consciousness and attention with a skillful purpose.

To understand how this is done, we have to look in more detail at the factors of dependent co-arising that provide consciousness and attention with their sense of purpose. And the most coherent way to do that is to review the above factors in forward order, starting with ignorance.

"Ignorance" in the context of dependent co-arising doesn't mean a general delusion or lack of information. It means not viewing experience in terms of the four noble truths. Any other framework for viewing experience, no matter how sophisticated, would qualify as ignorance. Typical examples given in the Canon (MN 2, MN 38, SN 12:20) include seeing things through the framework of self and other, or of existence and non-existence: What am I? What am I not? Do I exist? Do I not exist? Do things outside me exist? Do they not?

Viewing experience with right view means not getting involved in trying to answer these questions. Instead, right view focuses directly on the questions of what stress is, how it's caused, and how it can be brought to an end. As we noted in Chapter One, viewing experience in terms of the four noble truths also includes understanding the motivation for using this framework and knowing the tasks directed by the framework: comprehending stress, abandoning its origination, realizing its cessation, and developing the path to its cessation.

The motivation, of course, is the desire to put an end to suffering and stress. Without this desire, you would see no reason to replace ignorance with

knowledge, and the path would never take root. In recognition of the fact that all phenomena are rooted in desire (AN 10:58; SN 51:15), you have to replace the desires underlying ignorance with the desire to focus primary attention on how to understand suffering and bring it to an end. You adopt the framework of the four noble truths because you're convinced that it will direct you to where you want to go.

As for the tasks dictated by the framework, these are an essential element in the knowledge replacing ignorance as well. The Pāli word the Buddha chose for ignorance—*avijjā*—is the opposite of *vijjā,* which means not only "knowledge" but also "skill," as in the skills of a doctor or animal-trainer. In stating that people suffer from not knowing in terms of the four noble truths, he wasn't just saying that they lack information or direct knowledge of those truths. He was also saying that they lack skill in handling them. They suffer because they don't know what they're doing.

This lack of skill conditions the way the mind intentionally fabricates or manipulates bodily states, verbal events, and mental states. As we noted in the preceding chapter, the breath is the primary means for fabricating bodily states, and practical experience shows that—in giving rise to feelings of comfort or discomfort—it has an impact on mental states as well. Even just breathing, when colored by ignorance, can act as a cause of suffering. As for verbal events, directed thought and evaluation are the means for fabricating sentences. Mental states are fabricated by feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain; and by perceptions—the labels the mind applies to things.

The role of fabrication here is to take the karmic potentials for experience coming from past actions and to shape them into actual present experience, at the same time introducing a purposeful element into that experience. For instance, with reference to the five aggregates *(khandhas):*

> "And why do you call them 'fabrications'? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called 'fabrications.' What do they fabricate as a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood… For the sake of fabrication-hood… For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications." — *SN 22:79*

This means that conditioned experience, even at the most basic level, is for the sake of something at all times, both in the present and on into the future. Now, this "for the sake of something" functions on many levels. As SN 22:60 indicates, the mind isn't infatuated with the aggregates for their own sake; it's infatuated with them for the sake of the pleasures they provide. In other words, they're tools. Because the mind uses the aggregates as tools in the pursuit of pleasure, experience starts by fabricating the tools it wants.

This process of fabrication relates to all three time frames. Informed by the past, it shapes the present as it leans toward to the future. The future orientation of fabrication is illustrated by the skillful verbal fabrications we noted in MN 118, which are expressed in the future tense: "I will breathe.…" The same principle, of course, operates in unskillful verbal fabrications as well. At the same time, the

purpose at which fabrication aims has to be shaped by memories from the past, of what has and hasn't worked in producing happiness. As long as those memories are ignorant, the present- and future-leaning quality of fabrication will lean toward suffering and stress.

As SN 22:79 shows, the factor of sensory consciousness that follows on fabrication is anything but passive awareness. It's colored and motivated by the sense of purpose provided by the ignorant fabrications that turn it from a potential into an actuality. SN 22:54 illustrates the active nature of consciousness with an analogy: Consciousness is like a seed that grows and proliferates by feeding off the soil provided by form, feeling, perceptions, and fabrications. As dependent co-arising shows, among the proliferations produced by this consciousness is a cluster of mental and physical events called name-and-form.

This is the stage, under the heading of "name," where attention occurs. As if the preconditions for attention weren't already complex enough, its co-conditions in name-and-form add another level of complexity. "Form" means the form of the body as experienced from within as properties of earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (energy), and fire (heat), and as shaped by the activity of breathing (part of the wind property). "Name" includes not only attention, but also intention, again (as a repetition of fabrication in general); feeling and perception, again (as a repetition of mental fabrication); and contact, which here apparently means contact among all the factors already listed. The repetition of these factors is an illustration of the non-linear nature of the causal sequence.

All of these conditions, acting together under the influence of ignorance in the unawakened mind, color every act of attention to contact with the world of the six senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, the tactile sense, and the intellect that knows mental qualities and ideas.

This is why what may appear to be a simple act of attention is anything but simple, and anything but bare. It's shaped, consciously or not, by views and the intentional actions informed by those views. If those views are ignorant, the act of attention is conditioned to be inappropriate: applied to the wrong things, in the wrong framework, and for the wrong reasons, aggravating the problem of stress and suffering rather than alleviating it.

> "There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—does not discern what phenomena *[dhamma]* are fit for attention or what phenomena are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to phenomena fit for attention and attends (instead) to phenomena unfit for attention.…
>
> "This is how he attends inappropriately: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?' Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'
>
> "As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view *I have a self* arises in him as true & established, or the

> view *I have no self* … or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self* … or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self* … or the view *It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self* arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: *This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity.* This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress." —*MN 2*

The issue, then, is how to turn attention into appropriate attention, focused on the right questions, to avoid this fetter of views. One seeming option would be to use something unconditioned or unfabricated as a tool to free attention from the conditions of ignorance and fabrication, but that is an impossibility, for the unfabricated is not the cause of anything (MN 1) and has no features—no arising or passing away—by which it could be used as a tool.

> "Now these three are unfabricated characteristics of what is unfabricated. Which three? No arising is discernable, no passing away is discernable, no alteration while staying is discernable." —*AN 3:47*

Because the unfabricated cannot be used in any way, there is only one possible approach: the Buddha's strategy of using the processes of fabrication informed by skillful knowledge to free the mind from the fabrications conditioned by ignorance so as to arrive at the unfabricated. This is why he called his strategy a *path:* Just as a path to a mountain doesn't cause the mountain, yet following it can take you there; in the same way, the path doesn't cause the unfabricated, but the act of following the path can arrive at the unfabricated. The dynamic of this strategy explains why the path, as a form of fabrication, is so self-referential: On the one hand, it takes the fabricated nature of experience, which is so often unskillful, and applies right effort to fabricate it in a skillful way. On the other hand, it aims at developing dispassion for all fabrications, which means that ultimately it has to turn attention to relinquishing itself.

As we noted in the preceding chapter, there are stages in this process. First the Buddha recommends mastering fabrication by using it as a tool to disband ignorant fabrications. Then he has you observe it as it's being used, so that finally you abandon passion for fabrication of any type. This is the basic dynamic of the path.

The standard description of dependent co-arising shows that when ignorance is fully ended, all the succeeding factors—including fabrication—also end. However, because the type of knowledge that replaces ignorance involves mastering a skill, there are two important points to note:

1) Ignorance is overcome gradually, in stages, as unskillful fabrications are increasingly stilled through mastering the activity of skillful fabrications aimed at dispassion. This is why the path progresses in a step-by-step manner as dispassion grows more encompassing to the point ultimately where fabrications totally disband.

2) The knowledge that replaces ignorance is not a disinterested awareness of things as they are. As the Buddha pointed out, he taught only stress and the end of stress (SN 22:86). The categories of right view are meant to help in bringing about the end of stress. This means that they're purposeful, aimed directly at developing the skills needed to bring stress to an end.

Because the role of attention on the path—as appropriate attention—is shaped by fabrications, it, too, has to be purposeful. It cannot be merely receptive all-around. It must aim at putting an end to the effluents *(āsava):* unskillful impulses toward sensuality, becoming, and ignorance that "flow out" of the mind and keep it returning again and again to stress. For this reason the role of appropriate attention is to choose to avoid issues that will encourage the effluents and to focus on issues that will help get rid of them.

> "The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—discerns what phenomena are fit for attention and what phenomena are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to phenomena unfit for attention and attends [instead] to phenomena fit for attention.
>
> "And what are the phenomena unfit for attention that he does not attend to? Whatever phenomena such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality arises in him, and the arisen effluent of sensuality increases; the unarisen effluent of becoming arises in him, and the arisen effluent of becoming increases; the unarisen effluent of ignorance arises in him, and the arisen effluent of ignorance increases. These are the phenomena unfit for attention that he does not attend to.
>
> "And what are the phenomena fit for attention that he does attend to? Whatever phenomena such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality does not arise in him, and the arisen effluent of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen effluent of becoming does not arise in him, and the arisen effluent of becoming is abandoned; the unarisen effluent of ignorance does not arise in him, and the arisen effluent of ignorance is abandoned. These are the phenomena fit for attention that he does attend to. Through his not attending to phenomena unfit for attention and through his attending to phenomena fit for attention, unarisen effluents do not arise in him, and arisen effluents are abandoned.
>
> "He attends appropriately: *This is stress … This is the origination of stress … This is the cessation of stress … This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identification-view, doubt, and grasping at habits & practices." —*MN 2*

This passage shows that appropriate attention is directly connected to right view, as it keeps the mind focused on the categories of right view. Other passages show that appropriate attention also attends to the duties appropriate to these categories. For example, it helps in comprehending the five clinging-aggregates, which are identical with the truth of stress (SN 56:11):

> Ven. Sāriputta: "A virtuous monk, Koṭṭhita my friend, should attend in an appropriate way to the five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Which five? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate. A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a virtuous monk, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant… not-self, would realize the fruit of stream entry."
>
> [This passage goes on to say that this contemplation can lead all the way to arahantship.] — *SN 22:122*

Similarly, SN 46:51 (see Chapter Nine) shows how appropriate attention is used to starve the five hindrances (thus helping to abandon the origination of stress) and to feed the seven factors for awakening (to help develop the path). These are some of the ways in which appropriate attention focuses both on the noble truths and on accomplishing their attendant tasks.

As we will see in Chapter Nine, the four topics mentioned in these descriptions of appropriate attention—the four noble truths, the five clinging-aggregates, the five hindrances, and the seven factors for awakening—all come under the fourth frame of reference: the act of remaining focused on mental qualities in and of themselves. And as we will see in Chapter Six, the primary use of this frame of reference is to subdue greed and distress with reference to the world. For this reason, the activity of appropriate attention—both in terms of the topics it focuses on and in terms of its purpose for focusing on them—falls squarely under the fourth establishing of mindfulness. Informed by right view, appropriate attention also includes the qualities of alertness and ardency in remaining focused. All it needs is mindfulness—to remember to stay focused—and the identity with the fourth establishing is complete.

All of this shows that there is no role for bare attention or bare awareness on the path. Instead, the type of attention that *does* play a role in the path is aimed somewhere: at dispassion. It plays an active, purposeful role in focusing awareness on how the processes of fabrication are causing stress and how they can be redirected to act as the path to the end of stress.

The sequence of factors listed in dependent co-arising shows what right mindfulness needs to remember in order to supervise the reconditioning of attention to make it appropriate. To begin with, there needs to be at least a rudimentary understanding of the four noble truths to counteract ignorance. This corresponds to right view. This has to be followed by an act of the will—fabrication—to act on the duties assigned by right view. This corresponds to right resolve and right effort. Finally, under name-and-form, there has to be the ability to remember to establish attention in the proper framework so as to keep these views and duties in mind in a way that will develop the steadiness of concentration in which the mind can remember to apply lessons learned from the past, and to pick up new knowledge from the present that can be applied in the future. These are the direct duties of right mindfulness.

This sequence of factors explains why MN 117 states that the factors of right view, right effort, and right mindfulness have to circle around every factor of the path so as to lead to right concentration. Without these combined factors, the processes of fabrication would easily slip back into their old, unskillful ways. With these factors, fabrication can be employed to develop all the factors of the path.

As we noted above, fabrication relates to all three time periods—past, present, and future. This is why the practice of right mindfulness has to relate to all three time periods as well: to the past through mindfulness, to the present through alertness, and to both the present and the future through ardency. Otherwise, right mindfulness would not be able to encompass all the aspects of fabrication and direct them toward right concentration.

Right concentration in turn provides an excellent opportunity for gaining insight into the role played by fabrication in shaping experience. It does this in five interconnected ways.

1) To concentrate the mind on any of the themes provided by right mindfulness, you have to focus on the role of fabrication in shaping sensory experience, for only when this factor is managed skillfully can right mindfulness perform its function of "subduing greed and distress with reference to the world" of the senses. In other words, only when you are sensitive to the fabricated nature of greed, distress, and the sense of the world nourishing greed and distress, can you successfully disband them so that they don't disturb the focus of the concentration you're trying to develop. This sensitivity helps to bring unskillful processes of fabrication out of the unconscious and into the light of day.

2) The ensuing state of concentration—especially when focused on the breath—requires further sensitivity to all three forms of skillful fabrication within the concentration itself:

sensitivity to the breath (bodily fabrication);
the use of directed thought and evaluation (verbal fabrication) in the first jhāna to bring the mind to stillness and to induce feelings of pleasure (mental fabrication);
and the use of perception (also mental fabrication) to keep the mind with the breath.

Note that these forms of fabrication involve not only the aggregate of fabrication, but also the aggregates of form, feeling, and perception. This means that the practice of right concentration takes advantage of the fabricated nature of all the aggregates to shape them in a positive direction: into the peaceful and pleasant abiding of jhāna.

3) Once you have acquired a taste of the peaceful pleasure that comes from fabricating states of concentration, you have a standard against which to measure the pleasures created by the fabrications of greed, distress, and all other unskillful mental states used to create pleasure in terms of the world. Through this comparison, you learn an important lesson: the calmer the fabrication, the better.

4) Once the mind is established in right concentration, it acquires a solid, still frame of reference against which it can observe even subtler movements of fabrication within the concentration itself.

5) As the mind's sensitivity grows subtler, it can see the stress caused by relatively grosser levels of fabrication within the concentration, which induces it to let them fall away in favor of calmer levels of fabrication. As the various layers of fabrication fall away, the mind progresses through increasingly subtle and stable levels of concentration.

> "When one has attained the first jhāna, speech has been calmed. When one has attained the second jhāna, directed thought & evaluation have been calmed. When one has attained the third jhāna, rapture has been calmed. When one has attained the fourth jhāna, in-&-out breathing has been calmed. When one has attained the cessation of perception & feeling [which lies beyond the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception], perception & feeling have been calmed." —*SN 36:11*

In fact, this procession through the levels of concentration all the way to the cessation of perception and feeling is one of the ways in which awakening is achieved. This is because the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling entails the ending of all three types of fabrication. That, in turn, entails a level of insight that at the very least can bring about the penultimate level of awakening, non-return. In one sense, this insight is the logical outcome of the pursuit of ever more refined states of calm, based on ever more refined types of fabrication. In another sense, however, this insight comes from a radical break from this progression, in that it confronts the fact that all types of fabrication, no matter how refined, involve some level of stress and disturbance. The only way to find true calm is to abandon fabrication altogether. This is how the pursuit of calm ultimately leads to the unfabricated ease of unbinding.

So the underlying dynamic of the five ways in which right concentration can foster insight into the processes of fabrication is one of sensitivity through manipulation, followed by the use of that sensitivity to bring about calm. This same dynamic is reflected in the basic pattern of the Buddha's sixteen purposeful steps for breath meditation.

For instance, in the first tetrad: When attention is directed to the breath as an object of mindfulness and concentration, you become sensitive to the way in which in-and-out breathing fabricates the experience of the body. From that sensitivity, you can allow that fabrication to grow calm. Similarly in the second tetrad, with the steps connected with feeling: You use the breath to develop rapture and feelings of pleasure, both of which help the mind to settle down. As you do this, you become sensitive to the effect that feelings—and the perceptions around them—have on the mind. Then you can allow that effect to grow calm. Similarly in the third tetrad, with the steps associated with the mind: As you use the processes of fabrication to bring the mind into balance—gladdening it when its energy is low, steadying it when its energy is erratic—you become sensitized to how the three forms of fabrication have an effect on it. That enables you to release it from them. In the fourth tetrad, your hands-on knowledge of fabrication sensitizes you to the inconstant nature of anything fabricated. That allows you to develop dispassion for the fabrications you see as gross. With dispassion comes calming: Those fabrications cease and can be relinquished. As this sensitivity to inconstancy is applied to increasingly subtle levels of

fabrication, it ultimately arrives at the radical calm of total dispassion, total cessation, and total relinquishment.

This dynamic of sensitizing the mind to fabrication by focusing attention on how to calm fabrications is one of the primary ways in which right mindfulness trains attention to become appropriate attention. In doing so, it can use appropriate attention—especially in the fourth tetrad, which is connected with the fourth frame of reference—to turn around and help in the refining of the fabrications that condition it. This shows how the non-linear aspect of dependent co-arising is not a mere formality. It's of immense practical value in the practice.

In a similar way, the dynamic of sensitizing the mind to fabrication by learning how to calm fabrications is also the basic strategy by which the sixteen steps develop tranquility and insight in tandem. As they work together, they foster both right concentration and right view, making right view more precise in its understanding of the effects of fabrication so that it develops the dispassion leading to full unbinding.

However, the qualities of tranquility and insight don't always develop smoothly in tandem, for sometimes insight overtakes tranquility, in which case you have to focus particular attention on the step of steadying the mind. In other cases, it's possible—on attaining the pleasure, rapture, and equanimity of jhāna—to become complacent and to stop short of the goal.

> "Just as if a man were to grasp a branch with his hand smeared with resin, his hand would stick to it, grip it, adhere to it; in the same way, the monk enters & remains in a certain peaceful awareness-release. He attends to the cessation of self-identification, but as he is attending to the cessation of self-identification his mind doesn't leap up, grow confident, steadfast, or firm in the cessation of self-identification. For him, the cessation of self-identification is not to be expected.…
>
> "Just as if there were a waste-water pool that had stood for countless years, where a man were to block all the inlets and open all the outlets, and the sky were to not rain down in good streams of rain: the breaching of the waste-water pool's embankment would not be expected; in the same way, the monk enters & remains in a certain peaceful awareness-release. He attends to the breaching of ignorance, but as he is attending to the breaching of ignorance his mind doesn't leap up, grow confident, steadfast, or firm in the breaching of ignorance. For him, the breaching of ignorance is not to be expected." —*AN 4:178*

In cases like these, right view, right effort, and right mindfulness need to work together with appropriate attention to provide other tools that will make the heart leap up and grow firm at the prospect of the cessation of self-identification and the breaching of ignorance. These tools are composed of the verbal fabrication of directed thought and evaluation, and the mental fabrication of perceptions, designed to develop insight leading to dispassion for the process of fabrication at work in the activity of jhāna itself. Right view provides the framework for understanding why it's desirable to use these insight-inducing fabrications; appropriate attention directs attention to them; right mindfulness keeps them in mind; and right effort provides the energy to use them effectively.

These fabrications can be applied at any level in the practice of jhāna. Although SN 36:11, above, traces a path to awakening through all the levels of concentration, AN 9:36 shows that awakening can come about even with contemplation of just the first jhāna.

> "'I tell you, the ending of effluents depends on the first jhāna.' Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?…
>
> "Suppose that an archer or archer's apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all fabrications; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.'
>
> "Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents. Or, if not, then—through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight, and from the total wasting away of the five lower fetters [self-identification views, grasping at habits & practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation]—he is due to arise spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world." —*AN 9:36*

Note the four steps in this process. First, you master bodily, verbal, and mental fabrications to the point where they settle the mind in the first jhāna. Second, you focus attention on the fact that the first jhāna is composed of fabrications with inherent limitations. The perceptions listed in this passage—identical to the perceptions of appropriate attention applied to the clinging-aggregates in SN 22:122, quoted above—are an expansion of the more common list of three: the perception of inconstancy ("a disintegration"), the perception of stress ("a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction"), and the perception of not-self ("alien, an emptiness"). The purpose here is to induce a sense of dispassion for the fabrications of jhāna.

The third step is to develop perceptions that incline the mind to look favorably on the prospect of a deathless happiness that would be free from the limitations of fabrication. ("This is peace, this is exquisite.…") Finally, you have to remember—i.e., be mindful—to protect the mind from developing a sense of passion for the experience of the deathless, for that passion forms the final obstacle to total release.

Right mindfulness plays several roles in this process. To begin with, it acts as the theme on which the mind is concentrated so as to enter jhāna. Then it plays a supervisory role to remind you not to get stuck on that attainment: reminding you to look for the limitations of that jhāna, and reminding you of the perceptions that will help toward that end. It also reminds you to view the

ending of fabrications—even the fabrications of the path—in a positive light, and to abandon passion even for the much greater happiness of the deathless that appears when fabrications fall away.

Similarly, appropriate attention plays a purposeful role throughout these steps, directing you first to the object of your concentration, then—as we have noted—turning attention to the processes fabricating that state of concentration, attending to the perceptions that will develop dispassion for that concentration, and looking for any passion that may arise around the experience of the deathless.

Although appropriate attention looks for things as they are directly experienced throughout the stages of gaining insight into jhāna, it also knows—when reminded by right mindfulness—which experiences and fabrications to choose to attend to at which stage in the process. For instance, when the mind is beginning to settle down in jhāna, that's not a time to focus on the drawbacks of jhāna. When the time comes to focus on developing dispassion for jhāna, that's not a time to focus on how much pleasure and rapture the jhāna entails. In this way, appropriate attention is selective in what it attends to because, informed by right view and right mindfulness, it's aimed at a particular goal: the step-by-step mastery of fabrications leading to the ending of stress.

Only at full awakening, with the full completion of the duties associated with the four noble truths, does the mind drop all agendas and experience things simply as they are—or in the terms of the Canon, purely as they have come to be, free from the activity of present fabrication:

> "Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of stress'… 'This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended' … 'This noble truth of stress has been comprehended.' …
>
> "'This is the noble truth of the origination of stress' … 'This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned' … 'This noble truth of the origination of stress has been abandoned.' …
>
> "'This is the noble truth of the cessation of stress' … 'This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced' … 'This noble truth of the cessation of stress has been directly experienced.' …
>
> "'This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress' … 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed' … 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress has been developed.'
>
> "And, monks, as long as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, with its people with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & commonfolk. But as soon as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos.…

> Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.'" — *SN 56:11*

The three rounds in this knowledge and vision correspond to the three levels of knowledge for each of the noble truths: knowing the truth, knowing the duty appropriate to the truth, and knowing that the duty has been completed. The twelve permutations come from applying these three levels to all four of the truths (3 x 4 = 12). When this knowledge and vision is completely pure, it yields release and the knowledge and vision of release.

The consciousness attained through this release is the only type of awareness that the Canon recognizes as truly unconditioned, for—unlike every other form of consciousness—it can be known without recourse to sensory contact, even contact at the intellect.

> "'Consciousness without surface, endless, radiant all around, has not been experienced through the earthness of earth… the liquidity of water… the fieriness of fire… the windiness of wind… the allness of the all.'" — *MN 49*

The "allness of the all" here is a reference to the world of the six internal and external sense media.

> "What is the all? Simply the eye & forms, ear & sounds, nose & aromas, tongue & flavors, body & tactile sensations, intellect & ideas. This, monks, is termed the all. Anyone who would say, 'Repudiating this all, I will describe another,' if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his statement, would be unable to explain, and furthermore, would be put to grief. Why? Because it lies beyond range." — *SN 35:23*

"Beyond range" here means not "beyond the range of possible knowledge" but "beyond the range of adequate description," for there are other canonical passages indicating that even though the dimension beyond the six senses cannot be adequately described, it can still be directly known.

> Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "With the remainderless ceasing & fading of the six contact-media [vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, & intellection], is it the case that there is anything else?"
>
> Ven. Sāriputta: "Don't say that, my friend."
>
> Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "With the remainderless ceasing & fading of the six contact-media, is it the case that there is not anything else?"
>
> Ven. Sāriputta: "Don't say that, my friend."
>
> Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "…is it the case that there both is & is not anything else?"
>
> Ven. Sāriputta: "Don't say that, my friend."
>
> Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "…is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?"
>
> Ven. Sāriputta: "Don't say that, my friend."

Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "Being asked… if there is anything else, you say, 'Don't say that, my friend.' Being asked… if there is not anything else… if there both is & is not anything else… if there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, 'Don't say that, my friend.' Now, how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

Ven. Sāriputta: "Saying… is it the case that there is anything else… is it the case that there is not anything else… is it the case that there both is & is not anything else… is it the case the there neither is nor is not anything else, one is objectifying the non-objectified. However far the six contact-media go, that is how far objectification goes. However far objectification goes, that is how far the six contact-media go. With the remainderless ceasing & fading of the six contact-media, there comes to be the ceasing, the allaying of objectification." — *AN 4:173*

"Monks, that dimension should be experienced where the eye [vision] ceases and the perception of form fades. That dimension should be experienced where the ear ceases and the perception of sound fades… where the nose ceases and the perception of aroma fades… where the tongue ceases and the perception of flavor fades… where the body ceases and the perception of tactile sensation fades… where the intellect ceases and the perception of idea/phenomenon fades: That dimension should be experienced." — *SN 35:117*

After the experience of total release, the arahant returns to an experience of the world of the six senses, but with a sense of being disjoined from it because the mind no longer needs to feed on it.

"Sensing a feeling of pleasure, [the arahant] senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, he senses it disjoined from it. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones disjoined from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is disjoined, I tell you, from suffering & stress" — *SN 36:6*

Ven. Nandaka: "Just as if a dexterous butcher or butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow, were to carve it up with a sharp carving knife so that—without damaging the substance of the inner flesh, without damaging the substance of the outer hide—he would cut, sever, & detach only the skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between. Having cut, severed, & detached the outer skin, and then covering the cow again with that very skin, if he were to say that the cow was joined to the skin just as it had been, would he be speaking rightly?"

A group of nuns: "No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because if the dexterous butcher or butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow, were to carve it up with a sharp carving knife so that—without damaging the substance of the inner flesh, without damaging the substance of the outer hide—he would cut, sever, & detach only the skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between; and… having covered the cow again with that very skin, then no matter how much he might say that the cow was

> joined to the skin just as it had been, the cow would still be disjoined from the skin."
>
> Ven. Nandaka: "This simile, sisters, I have given to convey a message. The message is this: The substance of the inner flesh stands for the six internal sense media; the substance of the outer hide, for the six external sense media. The skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between stand for passion & delight. And the sharp knife stands for noble discernment—the noble discernment that cuts, severs, & detaches the defilements, fetters, & bonds in between." —*MN 146*

Similarly, as we noted in Chapter One, when the arahant after full awakening engages in right mindfulness, it's with a sense of being disjoined from body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities. At the same time, he/she continues to engage in appropriate attention. Although the purpose now is different from that of an unawakened person, there is a purpose nonetheless.

> "An arahant should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Although, for an arahant, there is nothing further to do, and nothing to add to what has been done, still these things—when developed & pursued—lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here-&-now and to mindfulness & alertness." —*SN 22:122*

So even though arahants have completed the duties and tasks associated with the four noble truths—and have gained access to an unconditioned awareness outside of the dimension of the six senses—their attention, when sensitive to the world of the six senses, is still a purposeful activity.

Which goes to show that—both in the course of the path and in its aftermath—neither mindfulness nor attention plays a purely receptive role. In line with the Buddha's depiction of the processes of sensory experience in general, they act purposefully. This is true whether the mind is engaged in giving rise to stress, following the path to the end of stress, or sensitive to sensory input after the experience of total release from stress.

In part, right mindfulness and appropriate attention serve overlapping functions on the path, particularly in line with the fourth establishing of mindfulness: that of choosing which phenomena and tasks to focus on in the present moment, and which ones to ignore. However, these qualities start from different functions: memory in the case of mindfulness, choice of what to attend to in the case of attention. Only when they are trained, through the addition of other mental qualities, to become right mindfulness and appropriate attention do their functions overlap. Even then, though, right mindfulness covers a broader range of functions, encompassing all the ways in which memory can be brought to bear on the purpose at hand.

The distinction between mindfulness and attention is an important one, for it's useful in sorting out the various ways fabrication shapes all the functions associated with the path. Only when they are seen clearly as separate types of fabrication can they be developed skillfully. It's like cooking: You want your

spices and herbs to be precisely labeled so that you can produce precisely the flavor you want in your food.

At the same time, only when these fabrications are seen clearly as fabrications can insight enable the mind to go beyond them. In other words, an understanding of the fabricated nature of mindfulness and attention is what allows you ultimately to develop dispassion for them when they have performed their duties. The ultimate duty of right mindfulness is to keep this understanding in mind so that, when the time comes, even the refined fabrications of the path—including mindfulness itself—can be recognized as fabrications and so abandoned for the sake of an unfabricated calm. Otherwise, the mind will mistake these refined levels of fabrication for unfabricated phenomena, a mistake that can stand in the way of genuine release.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Burden of Bare Attention

One of the most striking features of mindfulness as taught in the modern world is how far it differs from the Canon's teachings on right mindfulness. Instead of being a function of memory, it's depicted primarily—in some cases, purely—as a function of attention to the present moment. Instead of being purposeful, it is without agenda. Instead of making choices, it is choiceless and without preferences.

In the words of two modern writers:

"Mindfulness is the quality of mind that notices what is present, without judgment, without interference."

"Mindfulness is mirror-thought. It reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases.… Mindfulness is non-judgmental observation. It is that ability of the mind to observe without criticism. With this ability, one sees things without condemnation or judgment.… One does not decide and does not judge. One just observes… [W]hat we mean is that the meditator observes experiences very much like a scientist observing an object under a microscope without any preconceived notions, only to see the object exactly as it is.… Mindfulness is non-conceptual awareness. Another English term for *Sati* is 'bare attention.'… Mindfulness is present-time awareness.… It stays forever in the present, perpetually on the crest of the ongoing wave of passing time.… Mindfulness is non-egotistic alertness. It takes place without reference to self."

From the discussion in the preceding three chapters, it would appear that these writers are not describing mindfulness as described in the discourses. Other modern writers have noted the discrepancy here and yet have maintained that it's only apparent, that in actuality there's no real discrepancy at all. To support their case, they explain the canonical definition in terms that bring it in line with the modern assertion that mindfulness is bare attention. Their explanations fall into two major camps.

One is that the Buddha, in defining the faculty of mindfulness in SN 48:10, didn't actually define it as memory; he defined it as the mental state that allows memory to happen. In other words, attention lies in the background of the definition without actually being mentioned in it.

However, there are at least two problems with this explanation. One is that attention, in the Buddha's account, plays a role in engendering *all* phenomena (AN 10:58); even the modern interpretation of mindfulness-as-bare-attention identifies attention as the factor providing the basis that allows all other mental factors to happen. So there would be no reason, in defining mindfulness as attention, to single out remembrance as something that mindfulness-as-bare-attention allows to happen. Attention allows *all* mental states to happen.

Second, it's hard to understand how a purely passive state of mind would foster memory. Even a small amount of introspection shows that memory requires the active application of perception to the item to be remembered. If the Buddha's definition of the faculty of mindfulness were meant to point to the faculty of receptive attention, it does a remarkably poor job of doing so.

The second explanation is that the Buddha, in trying to indicate a process new to his system of meditation—that of watchful attention or observation—couldn't find an adequate word in the existing vocabulary of his day. So instead of inventing a new word, as he did in some other cases, he for some reason took the old word for "memory" and gave it a new meaning in practice, even though his formal definition didn't adequately express the new meaning he was, in effect, giving to the term. Although in some cases he continued to use mindfulness to mean memory, it obviously has a different meaning in the case of the establishing of mindfulness. In the words of one writer, "To establish mindfulness isn't setting out to remember something, but adopting a particular stance towards one's own experience… a stance of observation or *watchfulness* towards one's own experience" [emphasis in the original].

However, there are two problems with this explanation. The first is that Pāli had a perfectly adequate word for attention—*manasikāra*—and the Buddha continued to use it with this meaning. Pāli also had a good word for observation and watchfulness: *sampajañña*, which we have translated as alertness. So there was no need for the Buddha to create confusion by indicating attention or watchfulness with a word that normally meant memory.

The second problem with this explanation is that it's by no means obvious that the establishing of mindfulness is divorced from the act of remembering something. As we have noted in the preceding chapters, you have to keep in mind the task of remaining focused on any of the four frames of reference in and of themselves. You have to remember to be alert—this is where the watchfulness comes in—and to subdue greed and distress with reference to the world. In other words, the establishing of mindfulness is clearly a process of bringing memory to bear on the present moment.

So there's nothing in either the Buddha's definition of mindfulness or his actual use of the term to indicate that he intended it to mean attention or watchfulness. As we will see in our discussion of DN 22 in Part Three, there is every reason to believe that he saw mindfulness as a function of memory and used the term consistently in that sense, whether talking about the establishing of mindfulness or discussing it in other contexts.

The question arises, though, as to whether the modern approach to mindfulness is actually an improvement on what the Buddha taught. If it gives a clearer or more cogent picture of the practice, if it expands the range of tools available to the meditator, leading more effectively to unbinding, then the discrepancies from the Canon don't really matter. This is why it's important to look at the modern interpretation in a little more detail.

One of the cardinal features of the modern theory of mindfulness is that it starts with a purely receptive, unbiased moment of awareness that naturally occurs in all cognition. This is what gives mindfulness its objectivity and authority as a guide to truth: its ability to see things as they really are. The practice of mindfulness then extends that moment of receptivity so that it can provide a more solid foundation for objective knowledge of events in the present.

In the words of one writer, "Right Mindfulness starts at the beginning. In employing the method of Bare Attention, it goes back to the seed state of things. Applied to the activity of mind this means: observation reverts to the very first phase of the process of perception when mind is in a purely receptive state, and

when attention is restricted to a bare noticing of the object. That phase is of a very short and hardly perceptible duration, and, as we have said, it furnishes a superficial, incomplete and often faulty picture of the object.… It is the task of the next perceptual phase to correct and to supplement that first impression, but this is not always done. Often the first impression is taken for granted, and even new distortions, characteristic of the more complex mental functions of the second stage, are added.

"Here starts the work of Bare Attention, being a deliberate cultivation and strengthening of that first receptive state of mind, giving it a longer chance to fulfil its important task in the process of cognition. Bare Attention proves the thoroughness of its procedure by cleansing and preparing the ground carefully for all subsequent mental processes."

According to another writer, "When you first become aware of something, there is a fleeting instant of pure awareness just before you conceptualize the thing, before you identify it. That is a state of awareness. Ordinarily, this state is short-lived.… That flowing, soft-focused moment of pure awareness is mindfulness.… You experience a softly flowing moment of pure experience that is interlocked with the rest of reality, not separate from it.… It is the purpose of Vipassanā meditation to train us to prolong that moment of awareness."

The picture of cognition offered in both of these statements is primarily passive: The mind's first encounter with sense data is passive and receptive. In most cases, this state of pure receptivity is momentary and fleeting. The mind's emotional reactions may then interfere, denying it the time needed to form a clear or accurate impression of the data presented to the senses. However, any inaccurate impression picked up in that moment is not due to any distortion in its receptivity. It's simply not allowed enough time to form a complete picture of the data it receives. If that receptive moment is allowed enough time, it will pick up an accurate image of whatever is present. The deliberate practice of mindfulness simply lengthens the receptivity of that initial moment.

There are two main problems with this theory. To begin with, even if we were to accept the idea that such a pure, unadulterated moment of sensory receptivity actually exists, how can it be deliberately extended without turning it into something else? In other words, how can the motivation behind that act of extending that moment not color it and distort its pure objectivity? Won't the addition of motivation or intention immediately change the mind from its purely receptive state? For instance, if the motivation is to be non-reactive, that immediately turns the ensuing mental state into one of equanimity. This is no longer attention pure and simple, but attention with an agenda. If, on the other hand the motivation is to appreciate sensory contact more fully—to savor the taste of a raisin or the act of drinking tea—that creates a different mental state entirely: either contentment with what little you have, or the bittersweet attachment of tasting the fullness of life's small pleasures before having to let them go.

Now, both equanimity and contentment have their place in training the mind, but neither of them is mindfulness. And they have their limitations. As we have already noted, MN 101 states that equanimity may be enough to induce dispassion for some causes of stress, but not for all. And although an equanimous state of mind is more likely to see things clearly than an

impassioned state (see Chapter Six), MN 106 points out that it's possible to feel passion for the peace of equanimity, and so be blinded by it.

Similarly, although the Buddha in many of his discourses (e.g., AN 4:28) praised contentment with your physical surroundings, he also noted in AN 2:5 that lack of contentment with the skillful qualities in his mind was a crucial factor leading to his awakening. He had to be discontent with lower attainments to push his practice all the way to the higher attainment of total release. This means that, in the case both of equanimity and of contentment, there needs to be a separate mental function to remember to observe when these mental states are skillful and when they are not. Especially with contentment, the type of appreciation aimed at deriving as much intensity from sensory impressions as possible before they pass away can easily veer off the path into the extreme of sensual indulgence.

So there are practical drawbacks with the idea of trying to extend a moment of pure receptivity into equanimity or appreciation as an on-going state of mind. In either event, the simple fact of wanting to extend a moment of pure receptivity immediately distorts any objectivity that such a moment might entail.

The same problem applies even if the motivation for wanting to extend the initial moment of pure receptivity inherent in all sensory contact is to see things as they are, for that simply begs the question: for what purpose? Is the knowledge a goal in and of itself, or should something be done with it? In either case, there is a view behind the motivation, and a desire behind the view, both of which would color any awareness that would result from the effort to extend that initial moment.

But even if we were to grant the possibility that the motivation for wanting to extend the moment of pure receptivity inherent in all sensory contact could be relatively pure, we run into the second problem with any theory of this sort: the simple question of whether such a moment of pure receptivity as a common stage of sensation actually exists. As we noted in the preceding chapter, dependent co-arising gives a long list of factors that color awareness prior to sensory contact—both in the process of causing suffering and stress, and in the process of following the path. Many modern psychological studies give their own account of how the mind is primarily an active agent, driven by its own agendas in seeking out and creating the impression of sensory contacts that are not there, while being totally oblivious to those that are. A meditation method that assumes a moment of pure receptivity and focuses attention primarily on distortions that the mind creates *after* that moment, pushes into the dark all the most important factors prior to contact that lead to stress.

In addition to the problems presented by the modern theory of what mindfulness *is*, there are also the problems surrounding the modern theory of what it can *do*. Just as the Buddha cites a large number of functions that the practice of right mindfulness can accomplish, modern theorists give a similarly long list of functions that mindfulness, as a purely receptive state of mind, can perform. Among the items in the modern list: Mindfulness frees the mind from its preconceptions; it distinguishes the good from the bad; it keeps different wholesome states of mind in balance, working together in harmony; it reminds us of what we are supposed to be doing; it sees things as they really are, prior to

concepts, as not separate from the mind; and it penetrates to the true nature of all phenomena as inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

Given the complex, active nature of right mindfulness as depicted by the Buddha, there is little difficulty in understanding how it could perform the list of functions he assigns to it. But in the case of the more passive nature of mindfulness as depicted in its modern definition, the question arises: How can a non-interfering, non-judgmental state of mind do all the functions assigned it by modern theorists, particularly when some of these functions seem to involve passing judgment? Modern theories offer two explanations.

The first is that the mere presence of non-judgmental receptivity creates a space that allows skillful qualities to develop and unskillful ones to fall away of their own accord. One writer adopts the Canon's analogy of the gatekeeper to illustrate this principle, saying that "[J]ust as the presence of the gatekeeper prevents those not entitled from entering the town so too the presence of well-established sati prevents the arising of unwholesome associations and reactions at the sense doors." In other words, the gatekeeper doesn't have to be wise or experienced. He just has to sit there. The enemy, on seeing him, will know enough to stay away.

This explanation implies that the path factors of right effort and right concentration are unnecessary, and in some cases detrimental to the path, for their purposeful activity would interfere with the skillful effects of pure receptivity. This is one of the reasons why so much of the modern literature on mindfulness is devoted to making a clear distinction between mindfulness and concentration, and arguing that the four jhānas—the standard definition of right concentration—are not a necessary part of the path. Other modern accounts depict right effort and right mindfulness as two distinct paths.

However, the notion that the qualities of the mind, when simply observed, will naturally tend toward the skillful ignores the Buddha's observation that the mind will feel dispassion for some causes of stress simply by observing them, but not for all. Many of the most tenacious causes require serious exertion and conscious fabrication.

Some theorists argue that the power of pure receptivity is in line with the Buddha's understanding of mindfulness by citing this passage from DN 22:

> "Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, not clinging to anything in the world." —*DN 22*

This, the argument goes, is a synopsis of how mindfulness is to be practiced—just to the extent of knowledge and remembrance, allowing skillful and unskillful qualities to sort themselves out as they arise. However, as the "or" at the beginning of the passage suggests, this is simply one alternative way in which mindfulness can be practiced. As we will see in Chapter Eight, this passage follows on standard descriptions of two other, more basic alternatives: the establishings of mindfulness and the development of the establishings of mindfulness. As we have already noted in Chapter Two, those two stages involve conscious effort in developing and abandoning. Only when they have been completed is the mind ready for the equipoise described in this passage. So

the argument based on interpreting this passage as a synopsis encompassing the entirety of mindfulness practice cannot stand.

At the same time, some theorists explain the power of pure receptivity by maintaining that as long as the mind doesn't react to sensory data, no fabrications are created. In other words, non-reactivity is an unfabricated state—or, in the words of a popular modern teaching, "A moment of mindfulness is a moment of nibbāna." This, however, misses the fact that non-reactivity—whether termed "mindfulness" or "equanimity"—is something willed through intention. To assume that either mindfulness or equanimity is unfabricated prevents the mind from seeing how it's actually fabricating these qualities in the present moment. This would simply continue the sort of ignorance that lies at the root of suffering and stress. At the same time, this assumption erases any distinction between the path and the goal—a confusion that would effectively prevent any level of awakening from happening.

Other theorists, rather than trying to explain the multiple effects of bare attention, simply state that mindfulness is mysterious. Given that the purpose of insight is to penetrate the functioning of fabrication, this explanation offers no insight at all.

So none of the theories offered for the idea that pure receptivity, on its own, can perform the functions of the path provide a satisfactory explanation for why they should be adopted. Because their approach places severe limitations on the range of strategies that can be used to induce dispassion, there is no practical reason for adopting them, either.

The second explanation for how mindfulness—as a non-interfering, non-judgmental state of mind—can perform multiple functions on the path is that mindfulness itself does not perform these functions. Instead, it provides an objective basis of clear knowing on which the other factors of the path can perform their separate functions.

This explanation bears some resemblance to the canonical explanation of mindfulness, the difference being that it attributes to mindfulness a role similar to that allotted by the canonical explanation to alertness: knowing what's going on in the mind, knowing what you're doing, and allowing for other factors of the path to function effectively. However, this theory is still burdened with the two main difficulties we noted above concerning the idea of bare attention: first, the question of whether a non-interfering, non-judgmental mind state can still be regarded as non-interfering and non-judgmental in the presence of the interference and judgments needed for such path factors as right view, right effort, or right concentration; second, the question of whether such a purely receptive mind state actually exists.

Some theorists combine both these modern explanations, arriving at a strategy similar to the one described in MN 101: using non-reactive awareness to deal with some causes of stress, and more active factors to deal with others. For this reason, there would seem to be little practical difference between this combined theory and the canonical explanation. The only difference would appear to be semantic, simply a matter of moving the terms around.

But semantic issues can have practical consequences. If mindfulness is defined as alertness, there is no term in the satipaṭṭhāna formula to account for the role of memory in the practice. Even if we were to accept the modern contention that mindfulness training is aimed only at one dimension of time—the present—it's

hard to see how training in mindfulness would not need to encompass the other two dimensions of time as well: the future for motivation, and the past for guidance. Remembering what to do and why you're doing it is an important part of sticking with any practice.

This point is illustrated, ironically, by a comment made by a teacher who holds to the definition of mindfulness as awareness of the present: that mindfulness is easy; it's remembering to be mindful that's hard. It would be strange if the Buddha did not account for one of the hardest parts of mindfulness practice in his instructions. To leave the role of memory unstated is to leave it unclear in the mind of the practitioner, driven underground where it becomes hidden from honest inquiry.

Perhaps it's to compensate for this deficiency that some modern theorists go one step further to combine the modern explanations with the canonical explanation into a single theory. In one version of this combined theory, mindfulness functions both as memory and as bare awareness, although bare awareness as a broad, open state of mind is its overarching function: "As a mental quality, sati represents the deliberate cultivation and a qualitative improvement of the receptive awareness that characterizes the initial stages of the perceptual process. Important aspects of sati are bare and equanimous receptivity, combined with an alert, broad, and open state of mind.… Sati is not really defined as memory, but as that which facilitates and enables memory.… Based on the nuance of 'breadth of mind', *sati* can be understood to represent the ability to simultaneously maintain in one's mind the various elements and facets of a particular situation. This can be applied to both the faculty of memory and to awareness of the present moment."

This explanation, however, rather than clarifying the processes at work on the path, actually creates more confusion. It conflates within one word a set of functions that the Buddha allots to three: mindfulness, attention, and alertness. And it's still burdened with the two main difficulties shared by all theories based on the idea of bare attention: first, the question of whether a purely receptive, non-interfering mind state can still be regarded as receptive and non-interfering if it's functioning together with a more purposeful activity; second, the question of whether such a mind state actually exists.

In contrast, the canonical description, taken on its own terms, has the advantage of not being burdened by the conceptual difficulties of the modern definition of mindfulness. It doesn't have to explain the possibility of purely receptive awareness. Instead of pointing attention away from the role of memory, desire, and fabrication in preconditioning sensory contact, it points straight at that role, allowing for greater insight. At the same time, it uses that role to a skillful end: employing memory, desire, and fabrication to put a genuine end to suffering and stress. Instead of encompassing many different functions under one word, it employs a precise, detailed vocabulary that aids in a precise command of the various factors that need to be combined and harmonized along the path.

More importantly, because it explains meditation in the same terms that the Canon uses to explain the process of dependent co-arising, and because this process is supposed to be discovered in the course of meditation, the canonical description is an aid to liberating insight. It shows how the activity of meditation itself provides examples of the mental activities that need to be understood to

put an end to suffering and stress. This is surely one of the most basic requirements for any theory that sets out to clarify how meditation works.

But above all, the canonical description is fully in keeping with the Buddha's stated focus for his teaching. Instead of trying to provide an objective description of all reality, he focused on only two things: stress and the ending of stress (SN 22:86). Instead of denying the purposeful nature of all experience—or searching for a purely passive awareness, receptive to scientific or objective Truth—he took up the purposeful nature of experience, already aimed at happiness, and harnessed it to the purpose of finding a true happiness, a true end to stress. The difference in these two approaches may be subtle, but it's important. Mindfulness, as defined in the Canon, helps to accomplish the Buddha's purpose not only by keeping it in mind, but also by remembering what to do and what not to do, and how to see things in order to actually bring that purpose about. At the same time, mindfulness as memory helps to keep in mind the standards by which the results of the practice are to be assessed in a truly reliable way.

These are some of the reasons—both conceptual and practical—why the modern explanations of mindfulness are actually inferior to the explanation given in the Canon, and why they should be put aside when looking at what the Canon has to say.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FIVE

Mindfulness of Reading

The two discourses in the Pāli Canon that provide the most extended treatment of the practice of satipaṭṭhāna are DN 22, the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (The Great Establishings of Mindfulness Discourse), and MN 118, the Ānāpānasati Sutta (The Mindfulness of In-&-Out Breathing Discourse). Because these two discourses offer so much information, they are worth reading and analyzing in detail.

Of the two, DN 22 provides the longer discussion of the establishings of mindfulness in and of themselves. However, it gives only a sketchy treatment of how the establishings of mindfulness fit into the rest of the path. MN 118 provides a more complete picture of the larger context: giving the Canon's most precise explanation of a meditation practice covering all four establishings, and showing how the four establishings fit into the larger frame of the practice, leading first to the seven factors for awakening and, through them, to the goal of clear knowing and release. Because this larger context provides a better sense of the role and purpose of satipaṭṭhāna, we will discuss MN 118 first, here in Part Two, and DN 22 in Part Three.

There's an irony here, though, in that even though these two discourses provide more detail and a larger context than any other canonical discourses dealing with mindfulness, they still leave out a lot, both in terms of larger context and in terms of finer details. For instance, in terms of context, neither provides a definition of mindfulness; neither gives a full picture of how the practice of satipaṭṭhāna works together with the other seven factors of the noble eightfold path. In terms of detail, MN 118 lists sixteen steps in mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, but many of those steps require extra explanation as to what, in practice, they entail. At the same time, it gives no explicit indication of whether the sixteen steps have to be practiced in the order in which they are listed. DN 22 names various types of feelings and mind states that can be noticed in the course of developing feelings and mind as frames of reference, but it doesn't describe what to do with them. In fact, it gives almost no explicit attention to the role of ardency in the establishing of mindfulness at all. In other words, it leaves unexplained an important part of the satipaṭṭhāna formula. For this extra information, we need to look elsewhere.

One of the most fruitful places to look for that missing context and guidance is in the other canonical discourses. Some of the information to be found in those discourses we have already covered in Chapters One and Two. Here is a good place to review a few of the most salient points, as they will determine how we approach the act of reading and interpreting both MN 118 and DN 22. The major points are these:

1) Mindfulness is primarily the ability to remember, to hold something in mind.

2) Right mindfulness is a complex process called the establishing of mindfulness, in which you undertake the practice of remaining focused on a particular frame of reference in and of itself—body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, mind in and of itself, or mental qualities in and of themselves—ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. Of the three qualities applied to this process, mindfulness remembers from the past what should be done; alertness notices what is happening—and what you are doing—in the present; ardency generates the desire to deal skillfully with the raw material from which present experience can be formed, so as to lead to wellbeing both in the present and on into the future. Without this desire, right mindfulness would not be established.

3) There are two primary descriptions of how right mindfulness relates to the other factors of the noble eightfold path:

(a) In one, right mindfulness follows on right effort and leads to right concentration. There is actually some overlap between right mindfulness and these other two factors. Ardency in right mindfulness is equivalent to the desire motivating right effort, and the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world falls under two of the duties of right effort: preventing unskillful mental qualities from arising, and abandoning any unskillful qualities that have already arisen. As for right concentration, the four establishings of mindfulness are the themes of right concentration; the successful practice of the establishing of mindfulness in line with the satipaṭṭhāna formula is identical to the first jhāna; when further refined, the development of the establishing of mindfulness is a concentration practice that can lead through all the jhānas.

(b) In the second description of how right mindfulness relates to the other factors of the noble eightfold path, right mindfulness is one of a set of three factors that circles around the abandoning of wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood, and the development of the five right versions of these factors in their place. The set of three circling factors are: right view, right mindfulness, and right effort. The duty of right view in this set is to recognize the right from the wrong factor; the duty of right mindfulness is to keep in mind the need to abandon the wrong factor and develop the right, along with any knowledge gained from listening or from experience as to how this is to be done; and the duty of right effort is to generate desire and uphold your intent to follow the dictates of right view and right mindfulness.

This description covers the first seven factors of the path; MN 117 states that these seven factors then act as supports for right concentration.

It's important to note that these two descriptions are not mutually exclusive. In other words, they are not based on two separate, alternate definitions of right mindfulness. This is because right mindfulness as described in MN 117 comes under the fourth frame of reference described in the standard formula for the establishing of mindfulness: mental qualities (of the right and wrong path factors) in and of themselves. This means that the two descriptions can be combined to expand on each other.

When we do that, we see that the relationship between right mindfulness and right effort is reciprocal: Just as right effort tries to engender and

maintain right mindfulness in the first description of the path, right mindfulness informs right effort in the second one. In this way they work together to lead seamlessly to right concentration.

4) The establishing of mindfulness has a second stage, called the development of the establishing of mindfulness. In this stage, you remain focused on the phenomenon of origination, passing away, or origination-and-passing-away with regard to any of the four frames of reference. Because the term "origination" here means causation, this requires your active, ardent participation in developing skillful states of mind and abandoning unskillful ones so that you can see precisely which factors are causally interrelated and which ones are not. The proactive nature of this exercise is confirmed by the fact that the development of the establishings of mindfulness is accomplished by actively developing all eight factors of the noble path, including right concentration.

This means that there is a reciprocal relationship between right mindfulness and right concentration, just as there is between right mindfulness and right effort. Confirmation of this fact is contained in the standard description of the four jhānas, in which mindfulness becomes pure only in the fourth jhāna.

5) The practice of right mindfulness doesn't end with the attainment of jhāna. Through its connection with right view, it builds on jhāna in a way that leads to dispassion for all fabricated phenomena, opening to an experience of the deathless, free from fabrication of every sort.

These five points have a strong bearing on how MN 118 and DN 22 should be read, showing what information to look for in them and how that information is best understood and put into use:

1) Because mindfulness is an activity of memory, MN 118 and DN 22 are concerned with things a meditator should hold in mind when engaging in the practice. On one level, there is nothing strange here: All the discourses in the Pāli Canon are meant to be read in this way. In a standard description of how the act of listening to the Dhamma—which, at present, would include reading the Dhamma—fits into the practice, the first step after hearing the Dhamma is to remember it. The other steps listed in the description give helpful insights into how this memory is best used.

> "When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on greed… aversion… delusion, one places conviction in him. With the arising of conviction, one visits him & grows close to him. Growing close to him, one lends ear. Lending ear, one hears the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma, one remembers it. Remembering it, one penetrates the meaning of those dhammas. Penetrating the meaning, he comes to an agreement through pondering those dhammas. There being an agreement through pondering those dhammas, desire arises. With the arising of desire, one becomes willing. Willing, one compares. Comparing, one makes an exertion. Exerting oneself, one both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with one's body and sees by penetrating it with discernment." — *MN 95*

This description shows that the first steps in approaching the Dhamma are to find someone of trustworthy character and to spend time with that person. These steps serve as a reminder that the modern act of reading a text gives only a shallow impression of what can be learned from personal contact with an experienced meditator. In the initial pattern, you would spend time with the teacher, first to gauge his reliability, then to pick up his habits. Only in the context of a relationship of trust does the act of listening to the Dhamma yield its full benefits.

Once you have listened to the Dhamma and remembered it, you think it over and come to an understanding that encourages you to practice: First you analyze the teaching on its own to penetrate its meaning, then you ponder and compare it with other Dhamma teachings to see that it agrees with what you already know. According to DN 16 and DN 29, this is the stage at which you learn to identify what counts as genuine Dhamma and what doesn't. Only if the teachings new to you agree with what you already know with certainty should you accept them as genuine.

This agreement is what gives rise to a desire and willingness to practice, for you can see that the Dhamma makes sense. The desire here, as we have already noted, is what allows the path to happen. Based on this desire and willingness, you "compare," which apparently means (a) that you compare your own behavior in body, speech, and mind to the standards set forth in the teaching; and (b) that you compare the differences in the various aspects of your behavior to see which sort of behavior is skillful and which sort is not. (On this point, see Chapter Six in *Skill in Questions,* and the passage on analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening in SN 46:51, below.) Then you exert yourself to abandon unskillful behavior and develop skillful behavior to the point where you have a direct experience of the truth toward which the teaching is aimed.

The role of listening to and thinking about the Dhamma portrayed in this description covers the first three factors for awakening: mindfulness (remembering), analysis of qualities (penetrating, pondering, and comparing), and persistence (desire, willingness, and exertion). In this way, even the act of remembering a discourse and trying to put its teachings into practice gives a rudimentary first-hand experience of the connection between mindfulness and the factors for awakening—a fact noted in SN 46:3. As MN 118 states, this connection is then brought to culmination in the actual practice of mindfulness of breathing.

The implications of these points for the act of reading MN 118 and DN 22 are clear. You should try to understand both what each text means on its own and how it fits into the rest of the Dhamma. This should then give rise to a desire and willingness to compare your own practice with what the text says, to see how its instructions can give you guidance in becoming more skillful in your own practice. For this reason, as we look at these two discourses in the following chapters, we will pay attention not only to what they say, but also to how they fit in with—and are amplified by—other relevant passages from the Canon.

2) Although all the discourses are meant to be remembered and applied in practice, the particular nature of the establishing of mindfulness shows what sort of practical guidance we should look for in MN 118 and DN 22. Especially relevant here are the two qualities that accompany mindfulness in the act of keeping a particular frame of reference in mind: alertness and ardency. We will

expect these discourses to give advice on (a) what to be alert for in the present, and (b) what efforts to make in light of the ardent desire to shape the present and future in a skillful direction. We'll find that these discourses provide frames of reference for distinguishing which phenomena and distinctions among phenomena are skillful to pay attention to. This, in fact, is where they provide their most detailed information. We'll also find, though, that they are less than consistent in providing detailed instructions as to the duties of ardency in light of these frames of reference, and to the task of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. These are areas where we will have to look to other discourses to fill in the missing instructions.

3) The fact that right mindfulness plays the role of remembering to abandon the wrong version and to develop the right version of every path-factor confirms that we should look to these discourses for guidance in how to use mindfulness in proactively shaping experience into a path, rather than simply passively taking note of things arising and passing away. Because right mindfulness is so intimately connected with right view, we can use the duties that right view assigns to each of the noble truths as guides for how to understand this proactive role when looking for information from other discourses in cases where MN 118 and DN 22 provide little or no explicit guidance.

4) Because right mindfulness and right concentration are so intimately related, we'll pay special attention to the ways in which the establishing of mindfulness is illuminated by the Buddha's instructions elsewhere in the Canon on the practice of jhāna.

5) We will also look at the role played by right mindfulness in building on the practice of jhāna to develop the dispassion leading to a direct experience of total release. MN 95 describes this aspect of the practice as "realizing the truth with one's body and penetrating it with discernment." These two ways of describing the experience of total release parallel a distinction made in AN 9:43–45: To touch the truth with one's body is to master any of the levels of jhāna in such a way as to experience any of the psychic abilities to which they open (see AN 5:28). (Apparently this description relates to the way in which the increased sensitivity to the body obtained in jhāna allows some people to use the body as a means to access information on the psychic level.) To penetrate with discernment is to master any of the jhānas without that added experience, but to understand the fabrication of that jhāna thoroughly in a way that leads to dispassion. In either case, full release requires the act of penetrating with discernment; and as AN 9:44 shows, penetrating with discernment, even without "touching with the body," is sufficient for release. Because this discernment is the crucial factor in gaining release, we will focus primary attention on the way mindfulness plays a role in giving rise to it.

Looking at all five of these points in light of dependent co-arising, we can see that the ideal reading of MN 118 and DN 22 is one that takes the ignorance that causes fabrication to lead to suffering and replaces it with knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. This knowledge in turn motivates the reader to master the skills dictated by the duties appropriate to each of the four noble truths, which take bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication—the breath; directed thought and evaluation; feeling and perception—and turn them into the path to total release. These points relate to the three aspects of right view that right mindfulness must

keep in mind: the right framework for viewing experience, the motivation for adopting that framework, and knowledge of the duties and skills prescribed by that framework. A mindful reading of these discourses is one that keeps these points in mind while reading. It also takes any lessons learned from the act of reading in this way and keeps them in mind while training the mind to master those skills. That is the approach to reading MN 118 and DN 22 that will be encouraged in the following chapters.

CHAPTER SIX

The Structure of Breath Meditation

The central focus of MN 118 is the description of the sixteen steps in mindfulness of breathing. These steps are the most precise meditation instructions in the discourses, and they appear at many spots throughout the Canon.

Listed in the origin story to the third rule in the monastic code (Pārājika 3), they are the only meditation instructions given in the Vinaya, the section of the Canon devoted to monastic discipline. This shows that they were considered indispensible guidance for those monks who might memorize only the Vinaya in the course of their monastic career.

In the discourses, the sixteen steps appear in many contexts. MN 62, for instance, lists them after a long set of other, preparatory, meditation exercises: contemplating the properties of earth, water, fire, wind, and space as not-self so as to develop dispassion for them; developing an attitude of imperturbability modeled on the imperturbability of earth, water, fire, and wind, so as not to be disturbed by pleasant or unpleasant sensations; developing the sublime attitudes of good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity to abandon ill will, harmfulness, resentment, and aversion; contemplating the unattractiveness of the body to overcome lust; and developing the perception of inconstancy to overcome the conceit, "I am." These preparatory exercises equip the mind with tools for dealing with any unskillful thoughts that might come up in the course of breath meditation. In particular, they're useful skills for gladdening, steadying, and releasing the mind—trainings described in steps 10, 11, and 12 of the sixteen, a point to which we will return in the next chapter.

AN 10:60 lists the sixteen steps as the last of ten perceptions, preceded by: the perception of inconstancy, the perception of not-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks, the perception of abandoning, the perception of dispassion, the perception of cessation, the perception of distaste for every world, and the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications. Again, these nine perceptions are useful tools in steps 10, 11, and 12 of breath meditation, and we will consider them further in the next chapter as well. The fact that the sixteen steps are classed as a "perception" *(saññā)* here shows that the term "perception" is not limited to memory of the past, and reflects the fact that the sixteen steps are related to the practice of concentration, inasmuch as the levels of jhāna up through the dimension of nothingness are termed "perception attainments" (AN 9:36).

The Saṁyutta Nikāya devotes an entire saṁyutta, or chapter, to breath meditation. In eight of its discourses, the sixteen steps are simply listed—sometimes with the rewards that come from practicing them, all the way to total release—but without relating them to other meditative practices. Other discourses in this saṁyutta, however, do mention some of the meditative practices that can accompany the sixteen steps. SN 54:2 lists the sixteen steps in conjunction with the seven factors for awakening; SN 54:8 states that they lead to all nine of the concentration attainments. SN 54:10 begins with the sixteen steps and relates them to the four establishings of mindfulness; four discourses—SN

54:13–16—relate the sixteen steps, through the four establishings, to the seven factors for awakening, and through them to clear knowing and release. This last depiction shows that breath meditation is not just a preliminary practice. It can lead all the way to the goal of the path.

As we have already noted, this is the structure of the way breath meditation is depicted in MN 118. And it's important to note at the outset that this structure covers all three aspects of right view that right mindfulness must keep in mind: It provides a framework for understanding the practice of breath meditation. It provides, in the sixteen steps, instructions in the duties that follow from that framework. And it provides motivation for following the framework. In fact, the discussion of how the sixteen steps completes the practice of the establishings of mindfulness and the seven factors for awakening, culminating in clear knowing and release, is—in and of itself—an explanation of the motivation for practicing those steps. This fact is indicated by the statement introducing the structure of the discourse: "Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit." The remainder of the discourse can be read as an explanation of what those fruits and benefits are, and why they are enough to make you want to master the sixteen steps as skills.

The structure of MN 118 also provides an implicit answer to one of the primary questions concerning the practical application of the sixteen steps: the question of the order in which they should be practiced. The discourses that give the steps simply as a list, without relating them to the four establishings of mindfulness, seem to suggest that they should be practiced consecutively from one to sixteen. However, if you refer back to the section of Chapter Two where the steps are set out in bold type and read them carefully, you will notice that they don't follow a clear linear sequence. The steps in the third tetrad appear especially out of sequence. Step 10, for instance—gladdening the mind—would appear to cover the same ground as steps 5 and 6, breathing in and out sensitive to rapture and pleasure. Step 11—steadying the mind—would appear to be presupposed at the very least by steps 4 through 8, which deal with calming bodily and mental fabrication. Step 12—releasing the mind—would appear on the surface to be the goal of all the steps that follow it in the last tetrad.

The best way to resolve this question is to look at the sixteen steps in the context provided by MN 118, for even though the discourse does not give an explicit answer to the question, its structure does provide an implicit one.

As we noted in Chapter Two, MN 118 states that each of the tetrads corresponds to one of the establishings of mindfulness. It explains the correspondence between the tetrads and the establishings with these statements:

> *The first tetrad:* **"I tell you, monks, that this—the in-&-out breath—is classed as a body among bodies…"**
>
> *The second tetrad:* **"I tell you, monks, that this—careful attention to in-&-out breaths—is classed as a feeling among feelings…"**
>
> *The third tetrad:* **"I don't say that there is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing in one of lapsed mindfulness and no alertness…"**
>
> *The fourth tetrad:* **"He who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed & distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity…"**

At first glance, these explanations seem to raise more questions than they answer. To begin with, none of them makes specific reference to any of the steps

in the four tetrads. Instead of citing the obvious references to body, feeling, and mind in the first three tetrads, the first three explanations give reasons that could apply to any stage in any form of breath-mindfulness. The fourth explanation is even more generic, and could apply to any form of meditation in which greed and distress are abandoned. In addition, the second explanation is especially counter-intuitive, in that it cites attention—which is normally classed under the aggregate of fabrication—as a feeling.

However, instead of seeing the generic quality of these explanations as a problem, we can understand it as providing an important insight. In the first three explanations, the object of meditation—the breath—is the same. This means in practice that keeping track of feelings and mind states in and of themselves does not mean abandoning the breath for another meditation object. After all, feelings and mind states are present in the sheer act of remaining focused on the breath. When you shift your frame of reference from body to feelings or to mind, you simply become more alert to a different aspect or dimension of what you're already doing. In fact, it's hard to imagine that any ability to stick successfully with the breath would *not* require developing sensitivity to the feelings and mind states involved in maintaining sustained attention. MN 118 simply offers you the choice of focusing your interest on whichever aspect seems most fruitful at any particular time.

Similarly with the fourth explanation: The abandoning of greed and distress indicates the successful performance of an aspect of the standard description of the establishing of mindfulness: subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. This, too, is a necessary part of breath meditation. Only when you can successfully abandon this sort of greed and distress—even if only temporarily—can you stay focused on the breath for any length of time. The act of subduing this greed and distress may require either equanimity or the exertion of fabrication, as we noted in Chapter Two, but when the greed and distress are successfully abandoned, you can simply look on them with equanimity.

So here, too, the discourse is offering you a choice as to where to focus your attention while you stay with the breath. If you want, even at the most basic stage of actually staying focused on the breath, you can note the presence of equanimity—which is one of the seven factors for awakening, which in turn is one of the themes of remaining focused on mental qualities in and of themselves—as the aspect of the process you want to observe. You see that skillful qualities such as equanimity can be made to arise in areas where they may not have functioned before. This provides both encouragement on the path and practical insight into the processes of cause and effect within the mind.

As for the question of why careful attention to in-and-out breaths would be classed as a type of feeling in the second explanation, remember that SN 22:79 describes the role of fabrication as an element in the actual experience of every aggregate, including feeling. The second explanation here implicitly focuses on this fact, noting that by paying attention to the breath, you actualize the experience of feelings connected to the breath that would otherwise remain only potential. In other words, the act of attention is part and parcel of the feeling it fabricates. This explanation also offers an important practical insight: The best way to maintain the sense of pleasure coming from careful attention to the breath is to keep attending to the breath. If you switch your focus totally to the pleasure, the pleasure will lose its foundation and soon dissolve away.

In these ways, the four explanations offer some important insights into understanding the sixteen steps. In particular, they show that the sixteen steps don't necessarily follow a straight linear sequence. Instead, each tetrad can serve as an object of focus simultaneously with any of the other tetrads. As you practice breath meditation, you can remain focused on the second, third, or fourth tetrad while continuing to remain focused on the breath.

For example, there are times when you find it most helpful to focus on how the breath is giving rise to feelings of rapture and pleasure; to the way these feelings (as mental fabrications, along with the perceptions you're employing around the breath) are influencing the mind; and to how you can calm that influence. This would be an example of focusing on the second tetrad while simultaneously remaining focused on the first. At other times, you'll find it more useful to see which ways the mind is in or out of balance—too sluggish, for instance, or too scattered—and then use the breath to bring it more into balance. This would be an example of focusing on the third tetrad while still focused on the first. And at other times, you will want to observe how you can develop the dispassion that will enable you to let go of any external preoccupations that threaten to pull you away from the breath. This would turn attention to the fourth tetrad while staying focused on the first.

The possibility of combining tetrads in this way is confirmed by noting how the Buddha's four explanations can be mapped against the standard formula for the first establishing of mindfulness: "One remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world." The reference to the breath as a "body among bodies" in the first explanation corresponds to the phrase "body in & of itself" in the formula. The reference to careful attention in the second explanation relates to the practice of remaining focused described in the formula. The reference to mindfulness and alertness in the third explanation is an obvious reference to two of the qualities that, according to the formula, are brought to the act of remaining focused on the body in and of itself: being alert and mindful. And the reference to abandoning greed and distress in the fourth explanation is a direct reference to the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world, which also is an aspect of the third mental quality brought to the act of remaining focused on the body in and of itself: ardency.

In other words, the Buddha is showing how the activity of the first establishing of mindfulness—and this establishing, like all the establishings, is basically an activity—contains aspects of all four establishings, any of which can be taken as a frame of reference. The practical implication here, as we have noted, is that the shift in focus from one frame of reference to another doesn't require you to switch to a new meditation practice. It simply turns attention to another aspect of what you're already doing. This is like mastering a new piece on the piano. Once you've got the notes down and it's time to listen to how your playing sounds, you don't stop playing to listen more clearly. You keep on playing, again and again, while you listen to the nuances of your touch and phrasing, and to the overall thoughts and emotions you're conveying. This is what allows you both to develop more skill and to discover new things in the music.

Because these four establishings are the themes of right concentration, and because the mindfulness of breathing developed by the sixteen steps is termed a type of concentration (SN 54:7–12), we would thus expect the four tetrads to

offer four different perspectives on the single process of how right concentration develops. And when we compare each of the tetrads with the descriptions of the stages of concentration, we find that they actually do correspond. This correspondence plays out both on the macro level—each tetrad corresponds, in its own way, to the overall map of the levels of right concentration—and on the micro level: Each gives specific directions on what to do each time you sit down to develop right concentration.

First, on the macro level: The first tetrad—discerning the breath as long or short, sensitizing yourself to the entire body, and calming bodily fabrication (the in-and-out breathing)—describes the progress of breath meditation up through the fourth jhāna. You start by maintaining focus on the breath and then, as you enter the first jhāna, develop a full-body awareness (DN 2). The breath grows progressively more refined and calm as you move through the jhānas until you reach the fourth, at which stage in-and-out breathing stops (SN 36:11).

The second tetrad—being sensitive to rapture, sensitive to pleasure, sensitive to mental fabrication (perception and feeling), and calming mental fabrication—describes the progress from the early stages of meditation up through the cessation of perception and feeling. Rapture is present in the first two jhānas; pleasure, in the first three. Perception plays a role in all the meditative attainments up through the dimension of nothingness (AN 9:36); as you go through these levels, the underlying perception grows more refined (MN 121). Similarly with feelings: From the rapture and pleasure of the first two jhānas, feelings grow more refined through the equanimous pleasure of the third, and then to the pure equanimity of the fourth, which forms a foundation for the next four formless attainments (MN 140). Finally, the total calming of perception and feeling occurs with the cessation of perception and feeling, the ninth attainment.

The question arises, if verbal fabrication ceases with the second jhāna, and the breath with the fourth jhāna, how can any of the sixteen steps apply to those attainments or to any of the higher levels of concentration? After all, all of the steps are done in conjunction with breathing, and steps 3 through 16 employ verbal fabrication in the act of training. The answer is that even though these forms of fabrication are not present in the higher levels of concentration, the mind will sometimes have to make a deliberate choice when moving from one attainment to the next (MN 121; AN 9:34; AN 9:41). This will require a moment of reflection in which you step back from your full focus before plunging in again. AN 5:28 illustrates this process with the image of a person standing watching a person sitting down, or a person sitting watching a person lying down. Verbal and bodily fabrication will resume during those moments of choice, which means that any of the sixteen steps could also be applied during those moments.

The third tetrad—becoming sensitive to the mind, gladdening it, steadying it, and releasing it—covers all the stages of training the mind. Gladdening the mind begins with the preliminary practices of practicing generosity, observing the precepts, and abandoning the hindrances, practices that give rise to a sense of wellbeing and joy that can induce the mind to settle down in concentration. The gladdening grows more refined as the mind progresses through the first three jhānas, experiencing rapture and pleasure. It culminates in the joy that accompanies the attainment of the goal (MN 137). Steadying the mind is also a process of progressive refinement up through the cessation of perception and

feeling. Although each level of jhāna and each formless attainment grows increasingly steady as you go up the series, only the levels beginning with the fourth jhāna are said to be imperturbable (MN 106). Likewise, releasing the mind is a progressive process: You release the mind at least temporarily from the affliction of attending to perceptions of sensuality on entering the first jhāna, from the affliction of attending to perceptions of directed thought on entering the second jhāna, and so on up through the cessation of perception and feeling. Finally, release becomes total on reaching unbinding (AN 9:34).

The fourth tetrad—remaining focused on inconstancy, dispassion, cessation, and relinquishing—is, like releasing the mind, a process that develops through progressive levels of refinement while mastering concentration, and then goes beyond refinement with the attainment of total unbinding. When you're trying to master concentration, you direct these contemplations to any object that would distract you from your theme. In other words, you focus these contemplations on anything that would provoke greed and distress with reference to the world outside of your concentration, seeing the distraction as composed of events *(dhammas)* that are inherently unworthy of attachment. In this way, you wean the mind from the distraction.

When concentration is fully mastered, you then turn these same contemplations onto the world of becoming created around the concentration itself. You see that it, too, is composed of dhammas that are inconstant—even though the inconstancy is very subtle—and from that insight you develop dispassion for the process of continuing to fabricate anything at all, even the most refined states of concentration. This dispassion puts an end to the passion that fuels fabrication, thus leading to cessation. At that point, everything—even passion for the deathless—is relinquished, and total unbinding occurs (AN 9:36).

In this way, each of the tetrads provides its own perspective on the overall development of right concentration on the macro level.

As for the micro level, we will discuss some of the practical issues surrounding each of the four tetrads in the next chapter. Here we will look at their role in giving rise to the seven factors for awakening, to show why MN 118 singles this topic out for attention.

The seven factors for awakening *(sambojjhaṅga)* constitute one of the seven sets of dhammas included in the wings to awakening *(bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma)*, the Buddha's own list of his most important teachings (DN 16; DN 29; Ud 5:5). The seven sets overlap in many ways, and in some cases they differ primarily in the order in which they list the qualities needed to attain awakening. For instance, the five faculties and five strengths describe how concentration leads to discernment. The seven factors for awakening, on the other hand—like the noble eightfold path—describe how discernment leads to concentration. In other words, they describe the development of concentration in which insight plays a leading role. In this way they are congruent with the sixteen steps, for as we have noted, the sixteen steps show how to develop tranquility and insight in tandem when bringing the mind to concentration by focusing on how to understand and master the processes of fabrication.

This congruence appears in the overall pattern of the seven factors for awakening, which parallels the pattern of each of the four tetrads. The general pattern is one of observing and understanding the processes of fabrication so as to bring them to calm. In detail, the pattern is this: The factors for awakening are

listed in an order where each factor builds on the ones before it: mindfulness, analysis of qualities (according to MN 117, this is the discernment factor, equivalent to noble right view), persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity. MN 118 explains the natural progression from one factor to the next in this way, with mindfulness as a factor of awakening building on any of the four establishings of mindfulness:

> *Mindfulness:* **"On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady & without lapse…" [Similarly with feelings in & of themselves, mind in & of itself, and mental qualities in & of themselves.]**
>
> *Analysis of qualities:* **"Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality [any of the qualities or events present in the process of trying to establish mindfulness] with discernment…"**
>
> *Persistence:* **"In one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, persistence is aroused unflaggingly…"**
>
> *Rapture:* **"In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not of the flesh arises…"**
>
> *Calm:* **"For one enraptured at heart, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm…"**
>
> *Concentration:* **"For one who is at ease—his body calmed—the mind becomes concentrated…"**
>
> *Equanimity:* **"He carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity…"**

The pattern of this progression—beginning with three factors equivalent to right mindfulness, right view, and right effort—recalls the description of the noble eightfold path in MN 117, in which these three path factors circle around the development of other path factors in leading to right concentration. The only difference is that in MN 117 the discernment factor precedes mindfulness, whereas here the establishing of mindfulness comes first.

This pattern is also related to the three qualities fostered in the establishing of mindfulness: ardency, mindfulness, and alertness. Starting with the qualities of mindfulness and alertness used to establish mindfulness in the first factor of awakening, you further develop mindfulness and alertness when you remember to analyze phenomena as they occur in terms of cause and effect, skillful and unskillful (SN 46:51) in the second factor of awakening. Then, in the third factor of awakening, you exert persistence (which here is equivalent to ardency) to develop the skillful and abandon the unskillful in such a way as to lead first to rapture, then to calm, concentration, and equanimity.

The inclusion of the factor of analysis of qualities in this process means that the first three factors for awakening add the quality of discernment to the three qualities fostered in the establishing of mindfulness. This addition parallels the way in which the sixteen steps implicitly encourage you to develop discernment and insight by looking for the role of fabrication with regard to body and mind, seeing how cause and effect operate in the process of fabricating skillful and

unskillful states. It also, as noted above, parallels the way in which MN 117 describes the interaction of right view, right mindfulness, and right effort in fostering right concentration.

Building on this combination of ardency, alertness, mindfulness, and discernment, the remaining four factors for awakening begin with an active state—rapture—that provides the nourishment needed to keep the increased steadiness and calm of the mind from growing torpid and unhealthy. This rapture is then followed by the calming factors of calm, concentration, and equanimity.

This is the same pattern that operates explicitly or implicitly in each of the four tetrads. You sensitize yourself to a particular phenomenon—in terms of body, feelings, mind, or mental qualities—through mindful alertness, learning through experimentation and manipulation to understand that phenomenon in terms of fabrication and to analyze it in terms of cause and effect. Then you skillfully manipulate the causes of that fabrication so as to bring it to calm.

For instance, with the first tetrad: Steps 1 and 2, discerning long and short breathing, are a basic exercise in developing mindfulness and alertness, with the rudimentary amount of discernment needed to discern when the breathing is long or short. Step 3, breathing in and out sensitive to the entire body, raises the level of ardency as this is the first step in which you are said to "train" yourself. This step also raises the level of alertness, in that the range of your alert awareness is now consciously spread continuously to the entire body. This step is implicitly intended to bring about a realization of how the breath has an impact on the body, raising or lowering its level of energy, for in step 4 you are told to calm that impact by calming the breath (MN 44). Even though this step makes no explicit mention of inducing rapture, the progression of the seven factors states clearly that an important step in bringing the body to calm is first to induce a rapture "not of the flesh": in other words, a state of rapture based on either the first or second jhāna (SN 36:31). As we have already seen from the map of the stages of concentration, the calming of bodily fabrication can lead all the way to the fourth jhāna, one of whose factors is equanimity not of the flesh. This would be equivalent to the seventh factor of awakening.

The second tetrad starts with two steps—5 and 6—that provide exercise in developing alertness: learning how to breathe in a way that allows you to be sensitive to rapture and pleasure. Step 5 is the first of the sixteen that explicitly refers to raising the energy of your practice before calming it down. Both of these steps, however, also implicitly require an element of discernment based on manipulation, for unless you learn to foster the causes for rapture and pleasure you won't be able to maintain them continually as you pay attention to the breath. In step 7, the element of discernment becomes explicit, as you notice how feelings and perceptions—such as the perceptions by which you label feelings, and the perceptions that enable you to stay with the breath—have an impact on the mind. In step 8, you try to calm this impact by finding progressively more refined feelings—such as equanimity—and more refined perceptions to calm the mind.

The third tetrad is closely related to the second, in that it shares the task of calming the mind, but here the focus begins with the mind itself. Step 9 is an exercise in mindful alertness, as you try to stay observant of the state of the mind. Step 10, like step 5, is an exercise in raising the energy level of the mind by

gladdening it (SN 46:51 suggests that this be done only when the mind is sluggish); whereas steps 11 and 12 move more in the direction of calming it through making it steadier and releasing it from anything that afflicts it—such as the affliction of sensuality that would keep it from getting into jhāna, or any of the factors in the lower levels of jhāna that would keep it from attaining the higher ones (AN 9:34).

The fourth tetrad is also an exercise in calming the mind. On the beginning level of developing concentration, this tetrad is focused primarily on abandoning the hindrances to concentration. Step 13, remaining focused on inconstancy, combines an alertness practice with a discernment practice, as you try to see ways in which each of the hindrances and their objects are inconstant and thus incapable of providing any reliable pleasure or happiness. As AN 7:46 points out, the perception of inconstancy leads naturally to the perception of stress and not-self, both of which lead naturally to dispassion. In other words, you see that a happiness based on anything inconstant is inherently stressful, and thus not worthy of claiming as "me" or "mine." The resulting dispassion is the theme of step 14. When dispassion for the hindrances and their objects becomes well developed, steps 15 and 16—remaining focused on cessation and relinquishment—also follow naturally, as the hindrances cease through lack of passion for the process of fabrication that would keep them going, after which you can relinquish even the contemplations needed to bring them to cessation. With that, the agitation caused both by those hindrances and by their abandoning is replaced with equanimity. This is the first level of how the mind is calmed by the exercises in this last tetrad.

On a more advanced level, when concentration is fully developed, the same process is applied to the concentration itself. You focus on the inconstancy of the fabricated aggregates present in any of the jhānas in a way that leads to dispassion for all fabrications. When dispassion is total, the act of fabrication ceases and even the path factors of discernment and concentration can be relinquished. This is how the exercises in this last tetrad bring the mind to the radical calm of total release.

As MN 118 points out, any one of these tetrads can help bring the seven factors for awakening to the culmination of their development. The parallels in the pattern for each tetrad and for the seven factors help to explain why this is so.

However, as we have had frequent occasion to notice, the four tetrads are not radically separate. They cover four aspects of a single process. It's hard to imagine how anyone could master mindfulness of breathing without making use of all four tetrads, as you need to keep reading the state of your concentration. When you see that it needs improvement, you decide to focus on whichever of these four aspects is most in need of attention. The ability to read your mind in this way would come both under step 9 in the sixteen steps—breathing in and out sensitive to the mind—and under the first two factors for awakening: mindfulness and analysis of qualities. If the mind needs to be fed a particular type of feeling, that would bring in the second tetrad; and this, often, will require the help of steps 3 and 4 in the first tetrad. If the mind is harassed by distractions, that would require bringing in the other steps of the third tetrad and all four steps of the fourth. In this way, even though your main focus of concentration may be the breath, there is no way you can avoid bringing all four tetrads—and

all four establishings of mindfulness—to bear on the process of developing right concentration in line with the seven factors for awakening.

Of course, as MN 118 points out, the sixteen steps don't stop there, for the seven factors for awakening, when fully developed, bring about the ultimate goal of clear knowing and release—*release* here meaning the total release of unbinding, and not just the temporary release of concentration. As the discourse shows, this requires augmenting the seven factors with three qualities—seclusion, dispassion, and cessation—so that they result in letting go. Here again, the sixteen steps are involved. "Seclusion" is a reference to the mental seclusion beginning with the first jhāna, which requires the development of all four tetrads. The remaining terms are direct references to the steps in the fourth tetrad—"letting go" being synonymous with relinquishment—as the themes of inconstancy, stress, and not-self are focused on the fabrication of concentration itself, enabling the mind to develop the dispassion that leads to the total cessation of all fabrications, and from there to the total release that comes from totally letting go.

This last stage of the practice is described in several passages in the discourses. We have already noted, in Chapter Three, one of the primary relevant passages—in AN 9:36—and will have occasion to discuss it further below. Here are two other similar passages showing how this sort of analysis can be applied to any level of jhāna—while you are in the jhāna—up through the dimension of nothingness. With higher levels, it can be applied only after withdrawing from them. To save space, we will cite only the descriptions of how this analysis is applied to the first jhāna:

> "There was the case where Sāriputta—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Whatever qualities *[dhammas]* there are in the first jhāna—directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention—he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they became established, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it he confirmed that 'There is.'" —*MN 111*

> Ven. Ānanda: "There is the case where a monk… enters & remains in the first jhāna.… He notices that 'This first jhāna is fabricated & willed.' He discerns, 'Whatever is fabricated & willed is inconstant & subject to cessation.' Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents. Or, if not, then—through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight and through the total wasting away of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world." —*MN 52*

In each case, the act of seeing the jhāna as a willed, fabricated activity—rather than a manifestation, say, of a metaphysical or cosmic substrate—is what allows for the dispassion that leads to letting go. Because the mind's entrapment was due to its own clinging, and not to any restriction enforced from outside, the act of letting go is what effects full release.

The standard analogy here is of the way in which a fire goes out. That, in fact, is what *unbinding (nibbāna)* means. According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire exists in a calm, latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When "provoked" *(kuppa)* it seizes and clings to its fuel. It goes out—literally, it was said to be "released" *(mutta)*—when it lets go of its clinging to the fuel. For this reason, the agitated flames of a burning fire were viewed as an ideal image for the way in which the mind suffers from the agitation of clinging to the aggregates (Iti 93). The act of a fire's going out was equally ideal as an image for the peace and calm that come when the mind gains release through letting go.

This, then, is the general structure of how mindfulness of breathing progresses to freedom from suffering and stress. The four tetrads deal with four aspects of the act of establishing mindfulness to bring the mind to concentration: both on the macro level, corresponding to the standard maps of how concentration progresses to awakening, and on the micro level, giving instructions on what to do when you sit down to develop right concentration.

The first three tetrads—dealing with body, feelings, and mind—cover aspects of the practice that play a role in keeping the mind focused on the breath: *body* covering the object of the focus, *feeling* being the feelings engendered by continued attention to the breath, and *mind* covering the qualities of mind—mindfulness and alertness—brought to the activity of remaining focused, along with the mind states strengthened by maintaining focus.

The fourth tetrad—dealing with mental qualities—plays a role at one remove from the activity of keeping focused on the breath. In the beginning stages, it hovers around the process of staying focused, fending off any distractions that would disturb the focus. It does this by viewing those distractions as *dhammas*—mere events or actions—in a way that induces dispassion for them. At more advanced stages, it observes the process of staying focused from the same standpoint with the purpose of developing dispassion for that process, thus leading to total release.

So instead of being a linear guide to meditation, the four tetrads deal with processes of breath meditation that occur simultaneously, offering you the choice of where to focus attention so as to develop both tranquility and insight while fostering stronger states of concentration. In other words, when focused on the breath, you can see how feelings and mind states—along with the mental qualities involved in keeping distractions at bay—are functioning or malfunctioning. This allows you to direct your efforts toward correcting any lack or imbalance. When concentration is fully mastered, you can use the same fourfold perspective to develop the dispassion needed for cessation and total letting go.

The structure of this practice is important to keep in mind because it gives perspective both on how to handle the four tetrads in practice—the topic of the next chapter—and on the practice of the four establishings in general: the topic of the chapters after that.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fleshing out the Four Tetrads

Although the four tetrads constitute the Buddha's most extensive instructions on what to do when you sit down to meditate, they are still very terse. As one writer has commented, they are more like a telegram than a full text. This should come as no surprise, for—as we noted in the Introduction—these instructions were never meant to stand on their own. They were embedded in a canon of texts memorized by a community of practitioners who would use them simply as memory aids, both for teachers and for students. This means that they had to be long enough to convey the most important points—such as the fact that breath meditation is a proactive process designed to give insight into the processes of fabrication—but short enough to be easily memorized.

They also had to indicate, through inclusion, which aspects of the practice held true across the board; and, through silence and exclusion, which aspects allowed for variations from case to case. If everything were mentioned, the sheer volume of instructions would have been unwieldy, making it difficult to sort out which instructions were meant for everyone, and which for specific cases. So the terseness of the instructions, instead of being a shortcoming, is actually one of their strengths.

As we have seen from the preceding chapters, a great deal of practical, nuts-and-bolts advice can be unpacked from the tetrads when you look at them carefully, but even when unpacked they still leave many gaps. To get the most out of these memory aids, you have to fill these gaps in.

There are two places to look for information that will help you do this: within the Canon and outside it.

Within the Canon you can find this sort of information in three ways. The first is to look at how the tetrads provide perspective on one another. As we noted in the preceding chapter, they deal with four aspects of a single process—using the breath as a focal point for remaining focused on the body in and of itself – ardent, alert, and mindful – while subduing greed and distress with reference to the world—but the connection among the tetrads goes deeper than that.

This is because of the role of perceptions and feelings as mental fabrications. On the one hand, the bodily fabrication provided by the breath is sure to produce feelings; the feelings, then, can be used to manipulate states of mind. Similarly, perceptions are needed to stay focused on the breath—some dealing directly with the breath, others focused more on inducing the mental quality of dispassion for any distractions that would pull you away from the breath. These, too, will have an impact on states of mind, and on the function MN 118 assigns to the fourth tetrad. This means that when you encounter a problem in putting any of the tetrads into practice, you can often find a solution by looking at related steps in another tetrad. We have already given some indication in the preceding chapter of how this can be done, and we will draw additional connections among the tetrads below.

The second way to flesh out the tetrads with material from within the Canon is to draw from other discourses in the Canon that provide insight into how to

use the four frames of reference when developing breath meditation as a basis for tranquility and insight—both as means to concentration and as activities for using concentration to develop discernment.

The third way is to look to other passages in the Canon for alternative themes of meditation that will help in dealing with issues in these four frames of reference. In other words, when you can't get the mind to accomplish any of the trainings contained in the sixteen steps by working within these frameworks, you look for help from other, subsidiary themes of meditation. The Buddha's general instructions on how and when to do this come in SN 47:10. Because there is some controversy over how to understand this discourse, it's worth looking at in detail:

> "Ānanda, if a monk or nun remains with mind well-established in the four establishings of mindfulness, he/she may be expected to perceive grand, successive distinctions.
>
> "There is the case of a monk who remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on the body in & of itself, a fever based on the body arises within his body, or there is sluggishness in his awareness, or his mind becomes scattered externally. He should then direct his mind to any inspiring theme. As his mind is directed to any inspiring theme, delight arises within him. In one who feels delight, rapture arises. In one whose mind is enraptured, the body grows calm. His body calm, he feels pleasure. As he feels pleasure, his mind grows concentrated. He reflects, 'I have attained the aim to which my mind was directed. Let me withdraw [my mind from the inspiring theme].' He withdraws & engages neither in directed thought nor in evaluation. He discerns, 'I am not thinking or evaluating. I am inwardly mindful & at ease.'
>
> "And further, he remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on mental qualities in & of themselves, a fever based on mental qualities arises within his body, or there is sluggishness in his awareness, or his mind becomes scattered externally. He should then direct his mind to any inspiring theme. As his mind is directed to any inspiring theme, delight arises within him. In one who feels delight, rapture arises. In one whose mind is enraptured, the body grows calm. His body calm, he is sensitive to pleasure. As he feels pleasure, his mind grows concentrated. He reflects, 'I have attained the aim to which my mind was directed. Let me withdraw.' He withdraws & engages neither in directed thought nor in evaluation. He discerns, 'I am not thinking or evaluating. I am inwardly mindful & at ease.'
>
> "This, Ānanda, is development based on directing. And what is development based on not directing? A monk, when not directing his mind to external things, discerns, 'My mind is not directed to external things. It is unconstricted *[asaṅkhitta]* front & back—released & undirected. And then, I remain focused on the body in & of itself. I am ardent, alert,

mindful, & at ease.'

"When not directing his mind to external things, he discerns, 'My mind is not directed to external things. It is unconstricted front & back—released & undirected. And then, I remain focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves. I am ardent, alert, mindful, & at ease.'

"This, Ānanda, is development based on not directing.

"Now, Ānanda, I have taught you development based on directing and development based on not directing. What a teacher should do out of compassion for his disciples, seeking their welfare, that I have done for you. Over there are [places to sit at] the roots of trees. Over there are empty dwellings. Practice jhāna, Ānanda. Do not be heedless. Do not be remorseful in the future. That is our instruction to you all." —*SN 47:10*

The main controversy over this passage concerns how to understand the distinction between directing and not-directing the mind. One interpretation argues that directing the mind refers to jhāna practice; and not-directing the mind, to mindfulness practice: the former inducing a narrow range of awareness; the latter, a broader one. If you came to this passage with the idea that jhāna and the establishing of mindfulness are two radically different practices, you could find a few passages in this discourse that would seem to support that interpretation. The passage on directing the mind contains references to rapture, pleasure, concentration, directed thought, and evaluation, all of which are normally associated with jhāna, whereas the passage on not-directing the mind describes the mind as being unconstricted and released when developing any of the establishings of mindfulness.

However, *unconstricted* doesn't mean a broad range of awareness. According to SN 51:20, *constricted* simply means slothful or drowsy. So *unconstricted* means free of sloth and drowsiness. And when you remember that the Buddha did not draw a radical distinction between mindfulness and jhāna—as we have noted, the four establishings are the themes of jhāna (MN 44) and are themselves counted as a type of concentration (AN 8:63, [Thai: AN 8:70])—then you can see that this discourse is addressing a different issue entirely. Instead of drawing a distinction between mindfulness and concentration, it's giving advice on how to use mindfulness to bring the mind to right concentration in different situations. In some cases, mindfulness employs the four frames of reference; in others, it employs other themes.

When the mind doesn't respond properly to any of the four establishings of mindfulness—when, while focusing on any of the four frames of reference, it feels feverish, sluggish, or scattered—then you can follow the instructions for directing it. You call to mind a subsidiary theme that will gladden it or chasten it and allow it to settle down. When it's firmly settled, you can drop any thinking connected with the subsidiary theme, and this will bring the mind to a state of mindful ease equivalent to the second jhāna, free from directed thought and evaluation.

On other occasions, when the mind settles down easily—when it drops thoughts about external preoccupations and at the same time isn't slothful or drowsy—then you follow the instructions for non-directing the mind. You simply note that it's released from distraction and drowsiness, and it will

naturally settle into the activities of any one of the establishings of mindfulness. This in turn will provide a theme for the practice of jhāna.

In this way SN 47:10 gives general instructions on how to deal with the mind both when it is amenable to settling down with any of the four frames of reference and when it is not. The instructions in this discourse parallel the observation in MN 101, that there are times when problems in the mind respond to simple on-looking equanimity, and other times when they require conscious fabrication. In this case, the mind requires more conscious fabrication when it has trouble settling down with the four frames of reference. SN 47:10 provides no specific guidance on which subsidiary themes to use when that is the case; for that, we have to look to other discourses. That is a third way of looking within the Canon for help in filling in the gaps in the four tetrads.

There are also three ways of looking for information from outside the Canon to fill in these gaps. The first is to ask for advice from living people who are proficient in breath meditation. The Canon itself encourages this approach in AN 4:94, which advises you to approach a person skilled in insight and tranquility and to ask for instructions on how to develop those qualities in your own mind. Similarly, AN 9:36 recommends asking those who are skilled in attaining and emerging from both the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception and the cessation of perception and feeling for instruction in how to attain and emerge from those dimensions. The same principle applies here.

The second way to look outside the Canon for information that will fill in the gaps in the four tetrads is to experiment on your own. The Canon implicitly advises this method in passages where it makes distinctions without explaining them. We have already encountered a passage of this sort in MN 101, quoted in Chapter Two, dealing with the question of whether the causes of stress are to be abandoned through exertion or equanimity. Here's another passage of a similar sort:

> "And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *rapture* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture as a factor for awakening once it has arisen? There are qualities that act as a foothold for rapture as a factor for awakening. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen rapture as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture as a factor for awakening once it has arisen." — *SN 46:51*

This passage is fairly opaque. It gives no indication of what the qualities acting as a foothold for rapture as a factor for awakening might be. But the opacity can be seen as serving a purpose, in that it forces you to look to your own experience, or for advice from others, to discover what those qualities are. This would provide useful exercise in developing your own powers of ingenuity and discernment.

The third way to look outside the Canon for information that will fill in the gaps in the four tetrads is to consult books dealing with these topics. Normally this would include the commentarial literature—such as the Visuddhimagga (Path of Purity) or the commentaries and sub-commentaries on the various sections of the Canon—but in the case of breath meditation, this literature diverges widely from what the Canon has to say. Beginning with step 3 in the

breath meditation instructions, it tries to force the practice of breath meditation into the mold of kasiṇa practice, a practice rarely mentioned in the Canon but which had become paradigmatic by the time the Visuddhimagga was compiled. Because of the divergence from the Canon in this area, I have not chosen to draw on this literature in this book.

Although this book falls under this third general category, the main focus of this chapter will be on the three ways of looking *within* the Canon for advice on how to flesh out the four tetrads: drawing on insights from other tetrads, drawing on passages from other discourses that give advice on how to use the four frames of reference as themes in developing tranquility and insight, and drawing on passages that give advice on how to use other themes to accomplish the trainings contained in the sixteen steps.

However, it's important to bear in mind that the actual practice of breath meditation will require you to look outside the Canon for guidance as well. The Canon was never meant to function on its own as a guide to the practice. Instead, it takes for granted a living community of practitioners who can provide apprenticeship in the practice of meditation. This is why MN 95 lists the qualities to look for in reliable teachers: that they be free of the sort of greed, aversion, and delusion that would cause them to claim knowledge they don't have or to tell you to do things that would harm you. At the same time, MN 80 lists the qualities you need to look for in yourself: that you be observant and honest. So when, in the course of this chapter, we encounter steps that are difficult to flesh out simply on the basis of the Canon, you will know where else to look—both within yourself and without—to fill in the gaps.

MN 118 introduces the sixteen steps with a brief preamble:

> **"There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and establishing mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out."**

With the exception of one word, this preamble is self-explanatory. The one word is *parimukhaṁ,* translated here as "to the fore." The Abhidhamma, when commenting on this passage, gives an etymological interpretation of this word, saying that *parimukha* means "around the mouth" *(pari* = around; *mukha* = mouth or face). In other words, when focused on the breath, you should focus on the area around the mouth. However, the Vinaya (Cv.V.27.4) contains a prohibition against dressing the hair of the *parimukha.* Because the same passage also contains a separate prohibition against dressing the beard around the mouth as a goatee, the Commentary interprets *parimukha* in this case as meaning "on the chest." Obviously, then, the word has several meanings, and the question is whether it should be understood literally as meaning a particular section of the body, or more idiomatically as bringing something to the forefront.

Evidence for this latter interpretation comes from passages in the Canon where monks focusing on topics of meditation aside from the breath are nevertheless described as having established mindfulness *parimukhaṁ.* For example, in Ud 7:8, Ven. MahāKaccāyana establishes mindfulness *parimukhaṁ* when engaged in mindfulness immersed in the body; in MN 62, Ven. Rāhula

establishes mindfulness *parimukhaṁ* when contemplating the theme of not-self with regard to the five aggregates. Because it makes no sense to say that a person contemplating either of these topics should focus awareness exclusively on one part of the body to the exclusion of others—and because, in step 3 of the first tetrad in breath meditation, the awareness will become whole-body anyway—it makes more sense to interpret the phrase, "mindfulness established *parimukhaṁ*" as an idiom for bringing mindfulness to the fore. In other words, you bring the topic you plan to keep in mind up to the forefront of your awareness.

> *The first tetrad:* **"[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' [3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' [4] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'"**

Because steps 1 and 2 are not described as "trainings," we can infer that in the beginning stages of familiarizing yourself with the breath you don't consciously try to adjust it. You simply try to discern variations in the breath. The same principle would appear to apply to questions of whether the breath is fast or slow, shallow or deep, heavy or light.

However, steps 3 and 4 are described as trainings, and there are several reasons for assuming that you would consciously try to adjust the breath in these steps. With step 4 this principle is obvious: You're trying to calm the effect of the breath on the felt sense of the body. As for step 3, there are two reasons for assuming a similar principle at work. But before we look at those reasons, we have to discuss what the instructions in step 3 actually say, for there is a controversy as to what they mean by "entire body."

The commentaries—molding the practice of breath meditation into the pattern of kasiṇa practice, in which the mind has to become focused exclusively on a single point—insist that "body" here means the breath, and that the "entire body" means the entire length of the breath, felt at one spot in the body, such as the tip of the nose or the upper lip.

This interpretation, however, is unlikely for several reasons. The first is that the commentaries' interpretation of step 3 makes it redundant with steps 1 and 2. It's hard to understand how you could know whether the breath is long or short in those steps without being aware of the full length of the breath.

The second reason is that step 3 is immediately followed by step 4, which—without further explanation—refers to the breath as "bodily fabrication." If the Buddha were using two different terms to refer to the breath in such close proximity—"body" in step 3, and "bodily fabrication" in step 4—he would have been careful to signal that he was redefining his terms (as he does in a later part of the discourse, when explaining that the first four steps in breath meditation correspond to the practice of focusing on the body in and of itself as a frame of reference). But here he doesn't.

The third reason is that the similes for the jhānas, which are attained through the sixteen steps, repeatedly mention a full-body awareness. If the mind were forced exclusively into a single point, it wouldn't be able to spread feelings of rapture or pleasure throughout the entire body in the first three jhānas, or to fill the body with a clear bright awareness in the fourth.

One response to this last argument is that the word "body" in the similes for jhāna doesn't mean the physical body, because a person in jhāna has to be oblivious to the physical body. Instead, "body" is meant metaphorically as a term for the "body" of the mind.

Putting aside the question of why someone with the Buddha's teaching skills would use terms in such a potentially confusing way in his basic meditation instructions, we can simply note that in MN 119 he gives the similes for the jhānas immediately after his discussion of six ways of focusing on the physical body. As in the case of steps 3 and 4 in breath meditation, if he had meant "body" to mean "physical body" in one context, and "mind body" in the discussion immediately following it, he would have signaled that he was redefining his terms. But again he doesn't.

So unless we want to assume that the Buddha was careless or devious in his meditation instructions, it seems best to interpret "body" as meaning "physical body" in all of these contexts, and to interpret "entire body" in step 3 as referring to the entire physical body as sensed from within.

Although step 3 doesn't say to adjust the breath as part of being sensitive to the entire body, there are—as we noted above—two reasons to assume that some manipulation of the breath is involved. To begin with, step 3 as a prelude to step 4 is aimed at sensitizing yourself to the way the breath fabricates your sense of the body as felt from within. To gain this sort of sensitivity, you have to adjust the breath to see what impact that has on the various properties of the body as sensed from within.

MN 140 lists these properties as five: the properties of earth, water, fire, wind, and space.

> "What is the internal earth property? Anything internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, & sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, & sustained: This is called the internal earth property….
>
> "And what is the water property? The water property may be either internal or external. What is the internal water property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's water, watery, & sustained: bile, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's water, watery, & sustained: This is called the internal water property….
>
> "And what is the fire property? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: that by which [the body] is warmed, aged, & consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed, & savored gets properly digested; or anything

> else internal, within oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: This is called the internal fire property.…
>
> "And what is the wind property? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the stomach, winds in the intestines, winds that course through the body, in-&-out breathing, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: This is called the internal wind property.…
>
> "And what is the space property? The space property may be either internal or external. What is the internal space property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's space, spatial, & sustained: the holes of the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, the [passage] whereby what is eaten, drunk, consumed, & tasted gets swallowed, and where it collects, and whereby it is excreted from below, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's space, spatial, & sustained: This is called the internal space property." —*MN 140*

According to MN 28, three of these properties—water, fire, and wind—have the potential to become "provoked" *(kuppa).* In other words, when stimulated, they can become quite volatile. So when you explore the ways in which the in-and-out breath fabricates the inner sense of the body, these are the three properties most directly responsive to influences from the breath. With regard to the water property, this could mean breathing in such a way as to raise or lower the blood pressure, for example, or to change the flow of the blood through different parts of the body: away from an area feeling excess pressure (as when you have a headache) or toward an area that has been injured and needs the extra nourishment that a healthy blood flow would provide. With regard to the fire property, this could mean breathing in such a way as to feel warmer when the weather is cold, or cooler when it's hot. With regard to the wind property, this could mean breathing in ways that would regulate the flow of the energy already coursing through the different parts of the body.

The act of regulating the energy flow in the body connects directly with the second reason mentioned above for assuming that step 3 would involve adjusting the in-and-out breath. The standard similes for the first three jhānas (MN 119, cited above in Chapter One) state that you allow the sense of pleasure and/or rapture arising from those states of concentration to permeate throughout the body. This step is greatly facilitated if you know how to adjust the in-and-out breath so that the energy flow in the body allows for rapture and pleasure to spread in this way.

For these reasons, it seems best to interpret step 3 as including not only the ability to be sensitive to the entire body throughout the in-and-out breath—to prepare you for the full-body awareness developed in jhāna—but also the ability to consciously adjust the breath in a way that allows you to do two things: to spread pleasure and rapture throughout the body in the first three jhānas, and to develop a more general sensitivity to how the breath is the primary bodily fabrication in its effect on the other properties of the body. Of course, this adjustment has to be developed as a skill. If you apply too much pressure or are too heavy-handed in your efforts to adjust the properties of the body, it will give

rise to the "fevers" mentioned in SN 47:10. That will require you to step back from the breath and turn the mind to another theme for a while until you feel calmed enough to return to the breath.

The same point applies to step 4. If you apply too much force to calm the breath, it will play havoc with the properties of the body. The body will be starved of breath energy, and again a "bodily fever" will result. At the same time, it's important to remember—in line with MN 118's explanation of the relationship between rapture and calm as factors for awakening—that one of the most effective ways of calming bodily fabrication is first to breathe in a way that induces a sense of rapture to energize the body and mind. Otherwise, the act of calming bodily fabrication will have a stultifying effect, leading to one of the other problems mentioned in SN 47:10: a sluggishness or constriction in your awareness.

> *The second tetrad:* **"[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' [6] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' [7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' [8] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'"**

Steps 5 and 6 are a necessary part of training the mind, for they strengthen the mind in two ways. First, they provide a pleasant abiding in the present moment that allows the mind to withstand, at least temporarily, the types of pleasure and pain that would otherwise divert it from the path.

> "When a disciple of the noble ones enters & remains in seclusion & rapture, there are five possibilities that do not exist at that time: The pain & distress dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The pleasure & joy dependent on sensuality do not exist at that time. The pain & distress dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The pleasure & joy dependent on what is unskillful do not exist at that time. The pain & distress dependent on what is skillful [see the discussion of pain not of the flesh in Chapter Nine] do not exist at that time." —*AN 5:176*

Second, the rapture and pleasure provided by jhāna give discernment the support it needs to overcome sensuality entirely.

> "Even though a disciple of the noble ones has clearly seen as it has come to be with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, still—if he has not attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful qualities, or something more peaceful than that—he can be tempted by sensuality. But when he has clearly seen as it has come to be with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, and he has attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from

> unskillful qualities, or something more peaceful than that, he cannot be tempted by sensuality." —*MN 14*

AN 7:63, in its simile of the frontier fortress, compares the various levels of jhāna to food for the soldiers of right effort and for the gatekeeper of right mindfulness. Only if the mind can experience a pleasure and rapture not of the flesh—in other words, not connected with sensuality—will it have the nourishment it needs to keep itself protected.

In step 5, the Pāli word for "rapture" *(pīti)* is related to the verb *pivati,* to drink. Several passages in the discourses describe rapture as the food of the Radiant devas, inhabitants of a brahmā world into which meditators can be reborn through mastery of the second jhāna (DN 1; Dhp 200; AN 4:123). "Rapture" thus carries connotations of refreshment and rejuvenation. In the standard similes for the four jhānas, rapture is symbolized by movement: the movement of water through the bathman's ball of bathing powder in the simile for the first jhāna, and the natural movement of spring water throughout the lake in the simile for the second. Only in the third jhāna, where rapture is absent, does the water of the lake fall still.

Rapture can be felt both mentally and physically, a fact indicated by two passages from the discourses. The description of the seven factors for awakening in MN 118 speaks of the meditator who has attained rapture as a factor of awakening as being "enraptured in *heart."* The standard similes for the jhānas speak of the *body* as being permeated, pervaded, suffused, and filled with rapture when you are in the first and second jhānas.

However, rapture is not a feeling. In other words, in and of itself it is neither pleasant nor painful. Instead, it is more a quality of energy. None of the discourses describe the ways in which rapture may manifest, but later writings indicate that it can take many forms, some very gentle, others very intense: a thrill running through the body, or a wave washing over it. Some people find the resulting feeling of fullness pleasant; others find it threatening. This is largely a matter of perception. A sensation that one person perceives as quenching a thirst, another may perceive as akin to drowning. This fact in itself is an excellent indication of why perception is listed as a factor fabricating the mind, and why experience in dealing with rapture gives insight into how to handle perception skillfully in steps 7 and 8.

The fact that the sensations accompanying rapture can become unpleasant explains why the third jhāna—where rapture fades—is a more pleasant abiding than the second, and why the step of breath meditation aimed at pleasure is listed after the step aimed at rapture.

Training in rapture relates to several other steps of breathing meditation as well. Because rapture can be either physical or mental, some of the ways of inducing it will relate to how you adjust the breath in steps 3 and 4; others will relate to exercises in step 10: gladdening the mind. The highest level of rapture—what SN 36:31 calls "rapture more not-of-the-flesh than that not of the flesh"—is the rapture felt by an arahant when reflecting on the fact that his/her mind is totally free from passion, aversion, and delusion. This would result from the successful completion of steps 12 through 16.

Sukha—the word translated as "pleasure" in step 6—is the opposite of *dukkha* (stress, suffering), and like *dukkha* it has a wide range of meanings. These include

pleasure, ease, bliss, wellbeing, and happiness. In general, *sukha* can cover both physical pleasure and mental pleasure, although there are cases, such as in the third jhāna, where the mind is equanimous while sensing pleasure with the body. In cases like this, *sukha* is reserved for the physical pleasure, whereas mental pleasure is allotted a separate word: joy *(somanassa).*

In the standard similes for the jhānas, pleasure is represented by water: the water being kneaded into the ball of bath powder in the simile for the first jhāna, the water of the cool spring filling the lake in the simile for the second, and the cool water permeating the submerged lotuses in the simile for the third. Only in the fourth jhāna, where pleasure is totally replaced by equanimity, does water disappear from the simile.

Because pleasure, like rapture, can be either physical or mental or both—and because there is such a thing as "pleasure more not-of-the-flesh than that not of the flesh," the pleasure felt by the arahant reflecting on the release of his/her mind—the observations made above concerning how the steps in the other tetrads of breath meditation can be used to induce rapture apply to pleasure as well: physically, steps 3 and 4; mentally, step 10; and for the arahant, steps 12–16.

Step 7 builds naturally on steps 5 and 6 because only when you have gained experience in inducing states of rapture and pleasure, and in observing the role of perception in conjunction with these states, can you see clearly the way their presence and absence can fabricate the state of your mind. This will enable you, in step 8, to calm the impact of these feelings and perceptions as seems appropriate. In other words, after inducing pleasure and rapture in the first two jhānas, you abandon the rapture in the second, and the mental pleasure in the third, leading ultimately to the sense of non-affliction that comes with the equanimity of the fourth jhāna, which MN 13 describes as the highest allure of feelings. This equanimity then forms the basis for the formless attainments (MN 140).

The calming of mental fabrication, as the mind goes through the jhānas, echoes MN 118's description of the relationship between rapture and calm as factors for awakening: Unless the mind is already too energized, you have to make sure that it is energized before calming it. Otherwise it will grow sluggish and constricted.

There is an apparent contradiction in how some of the discourses describe the calming of feeling as you go through the third jhāna to the fourth. On the one hand, as we just noted, the third jhāna is marked by a state of physical pleasure and mental equanimity; the fourth jhāna is described as purity of equanimity, with neither pleasure nor pain. On the other hand, AN 9:34 describes the act of attending to perceptions of equanimity as an affliction experienced in the third jhāna that is abandoned in the fourth.

> "[He]… enters & remains in the fourth jhāna… If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *equanimity,* that is an affliction for him." — *AN 9:34*

The question is, if perceptions of equanimity are a disturbance in the fourth jhāna, why is the fourth jhāna described as a state of equanimity? This apparent contradiction can be resolved, however, by noting that the disturbance is not the equanimity itself, or even the mental labels about equanimity, but the act of

attending to those labels. The equanimity present in the third jhāna is something that distinguishes it from the second jhāna, which is why it is an object of note on that level. In the fourth jhāna, however, equanimity is no longer an object of note, so there is no interest in attending to perceptions about it.

This, of course, connects directly to the role of perception as a mental fabrication in steps 7 and 8. Several discourses provide more detailed information on the role of perception in fabricating calm for the mind.

To begin with, AN 3:102 provides a general framework for understanding which perceptions need to be calmed in order to bring the mind to concentration, and then from lower levels of concentration to higher ones:

> "When he [the meditator] is rid of [the gross impurities of misconduct in body, speech, and mind], there remain in him the moderate impurities: thoughts of sensuality, ill will, & harmfulness. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them, there remain in him the fine impurities: thoughts of his caste, thoughts of his home district, thoughts related to not wanting to be despised. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence.
>
> "When he is rid of them, there remain only thoughts of the Dhamma. His concentration is neither peaceful nor exquisite, has not yet attained calm or unification, and is kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint. But there comes a time when his mind grows steady inwardly, settles down, grows unified & concentrated. His concentration is peaceful & exquisite, has attained calm & unification, and is no longer kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint." —*AN 3:102*

In other words, before you can bring the mind to concentration, you have to cleanse it of two sorts of perceptions: those related to sensuality, ill will, and harm on the one hand, and those related to your relationships with human society on the other. Then, once the mind has attained a lower stage of concentration, you have to further adjust your perceptions so that your concentration can grow more steady and unified, providing a more refined sense of wellbeing.

Other discourses focus more on specific steps within this framework. MN 78, for instance, focuses on how the role of perception in right resolve leads from the grosser mind states associated with sensuality to the more refined pleasure of the first jhāna.

> "And what are unskillful resolves? Being resolved on sensuality, on ill will, on harmfulness. These are called unskillful resolves. What is the cause of unskillful resolves? Their cause, too, has been stated, and they are said to be perception-caused. Which perception?—for perception has many modes & permutations. Any sensuality-perception, ill will-perception, or harmfulness-perception: That is the cause of unskillful resolves. Now where do unskillful resolves cease without trace? Their cessation, too, has been stated: There is the case where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed

thought & evaluation. This is where unskillful resolves cease without trace.

"And what sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire… for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen… for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen… for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen… (and) for the… development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves." — *MN 78*

In other words, you use perceptions that induce desire for skillful states to undercut unskillful perceptions. One way of undercutting the perceptions leading to wrong resolve is to cultivate perceptions that highlight the drawbacks of sensuality. MN 54 provides a useful list of similes to help generate perceptions of this sort:

"Suppose a dog, overcome with weakness & hunger, were to come across a slaughterhouse, and there a dexterous butcher or butcher's apprentice were to fling him a chain of bones—thoroughly scraped, without any meat, smeared with blood. What do you think? Would the dog, gnawing on that chain of bones—thoroughly scraped, without any meat, smeared with blood—appease its weakness & hunger?"

"No, lord. And why is that? Because the chain of bones is thoroughly scraped, without any meat, & smeared with blood. The dog would get nothing but its share of weariness & vexation."

"In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a chain of bones, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose a vulture, a kite, or a hawk, seizing a lump of meat, were to take off, and other vultures, kites, or hawks—following right after it—were to tear at it with their beaks & pull at it with their claws. What do you think? If that vulture, kite, or hawk were not quickly to drop that lump of meat, would it meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a lump of meat, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose a man were to come against the wind, carrying a burning grass torch. What do you think? If he were not quickly to drop that grass torch, would he burn his hand or his arm or some other part of his body, so that he would meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a grass torch, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along—loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, abhorring pain—and two strong men, grabbing him with their arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. What do you think? Wouldn't the man twist his body this way & that?"

"Yes, lord. And why is that? Because he would realize, 'If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.'"

"In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a pit of glowing embers, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose a man, when dreaming, were to see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, & delightful lakes, and on awakening were to see nothing. In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a dream, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose a man having borrowed some goods—a manly carriage, fine jewels, & ear ornaments—were to go into the market preceded & surrounded by his borrowed goods, and people seeing him would say, 'How wealthy this man is, for this is how the wealthy enjoy their possessions,' but the actual owners, wherever they might see him, would strip him then & there of what is theirs. What do you think? Would the man justifiably be upset?"

"No, lord. And why is that? Because the owners are stripping him of what is theirs."

"In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to borrowed goods, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.' …

"Now suppose that, not far from a village or town, there were a dense forest grove, and there in the grove was a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, but with no fruit fallen to the ground. A man would come along, desiring fruit, looking for fruit, searching for fruit. Plunging into the forest grove, he would see the tree… and the thought would occur to him, 'This is a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, and there is no fruit fallen to the ground, but I know how to climb a tree. Why don't I climb the tree, eat what I like, and fill my clothes with the fruit?' So, having climbed the tree, he would eat what he liked and fill his clothes with the fruit. Then a second man would come along, desiring fruit, looking for fruit, searching for fruit and carrying a sharp ax. Plunging into the forest grove, he would see the tree… and the thought would occur to him, 'This is a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, and there is no fruit fallen to the ground, and I don't know how to climb a tree. Why don't I chop

> down this tree at the root, eat what I like, and fill my clothes with the fruit?' So he would chop the tree at the root. What do you think? If the first man who climbed the tree didn't quickly come down, wouldn't the falling tree crush his hand or foot or some other part of his body, so that he would meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?"
>
> "Yes, lord."
>
> "In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: 'The Blessed One has compared sensuality to the fruits of a tree, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks.'" —*MN 54*

However, MN 78 does not stop with the role of perception in supporting skillful resolves. It also shows how perception—in this case, the perception of whatever theme leads the mind to the second jhāna—can be used in moving beyond even the subtle disturbance of thinking associated with right resolve.

> "And what are skillful resolves? Being resolved on renunciation [freedom from sensuality], on non-ill will, on harmlessness. These are called skillful resolves. What is the cause of skillful resolves? Their cause, too, has been stated, and they are said to be perception-caused. Which perception?—for perception has many modes & permutations. Any renunciation-perception, non-ill-will-perception, or harmlessness-perception: That is the cause of skillful resolves. Now where do skillful resolves cease without trace? Their cessation, too, has been stated: There is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This is where skillful resolves cease without trace.
>
> "And what sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire… for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen… for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen… for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen… (and) for the… development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves." —*MN 78*

This is one of the ways in which calming the mental fabrication caused by perception stops even the activity of right resolve, leading to a steadier state of concentration.

As for the question of how to overcome perceptions related to human society when trying to attain concentration, MN 121 recommends first focusing on the perception of "wilderness" and observing how it is empty of the disturbances that come with perceptions of "village" or "human being." (This perception is easiest, of course, if you actually go into the wilderness, but can also be developed in areas that you don't normally think of as wilderness, for even large cities have their wilderness aspect as well.) Once you have taken pleasure, found satisfaction, settled, and indulged in the stillness that comes with the perception of wilderness, you notice if any disturbance remains. You see that there is,

caused by the perception of "wilderness" itself. After all, in the wilderness there are dangers (AN 5:77). So, to abandon that disturbance, you direct the mind to a more refined perception that can act as a basis of concentration. When you have taken pleasure, found satisfaction, settled, and indulged in that perception, you observe it to see first how it is empty of the disturbances that were dependent on the perceptions it has now abandoned, and then to see if there are still any disturbances present in your state of concentration.

In this way, the discourse describes the progression through the stages of concentration as a step-by-step process of increasing emptiness from disturbance. With each level, you note that you have abandoned some of the disturbances present on lower levels of concentration, but that there is still a modicum of disturbance coming from the perception that keeps you connected to the dimension forming the theme of that level of concentration. Dropping that perception, you attend to a more refined perception, and so on up the levels of concentration until you can drop all perceptions and attain total release.

Although the discourse uses the earth property, rather than the breath, as the initial theme of concentration, its recommendations for using earth as a theme of meditation can be applied to the breath by extrapolation. And its discussion of the formless attainments would apply directly to these stages when approached through breath meditation.

> "And further, Ānanda, the monk—not attending to the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space, not attending to the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness—attends to the singleness based on the perception of the dimension of nothingness. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, & indulges in its perception of the dimension of nothingness.
>
> "He discerns that 'Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space are not present. Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness are not present. There is only this modicum of disturbance: the singleness based on the perception of the dimension of nothingness.' He discerns that 'This mode of perception is empty of the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space. This mode of perception is empty of the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. There is only this non-emptiness: the singleness based on the perception of the dimension of nothingness.' Thus he regards it as empty of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: 'There is this.' And so this, his entry into emptiness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, & pure.
>
> "And further, Ānanda, the monk—not attending to the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, not attending to the perception of the dimension of nothingness—attends to the singleness based on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, & indulges in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception." —*MN 121*

What the Buddha is clearly recommending here is a direct observation of how perception fabricates the level of stress in the mind, and how it can be used

to calm that stress. Instead of simply replacing one perception with another, you examine how the more refined perception actually helps to empty the mind of disturbance. This approach leads to a greater insight into the process of fabrication. At the same time, it gives practice in applying the four noble truths to the processes of concentration. It looks for the stress—here called "disturbance" *(daratha)*—present in each level, then it looks for the cause of stress present within the factors of concentration itself, after which it looks for ways to alleviate the stress caused by the mind's own activities.

By viewing the state of concentration as a fabrication in this way, you avoid the sort of attachment that could come from viewing the dimensions reached in concentration as metaphysical principles. For instance, when arriving at the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness—which AN 10:29 identifies as the highest non-dual totality—you don't perceive it as a true self or a non-dual ground of being underlying the self and the world. Instead, you look for the stress caused by fabrication present in the experience of that dimension so that you can drop the perception causing that stress. As MN 121 shows, when you follow this process to ever-higher levels of refinement, you ultimately arrive at something greater than any metaphysical principle: total release from all suffering and stress.

> *The third tetrad:* **"[9] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' [10] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.' [11] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind. [12] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'"**

Step 9 is an exercise in sensitizing yourself to the state of your mind as you try—successfully or not—to focus it on the breath. The ability to observe the mind in this way is helpful in three ways. As you start out, it enables you to figure out what needs to be changed to bring the mind into right concentration. Once the mind has reached a level of right concentration, it helps you to figure out how to stay settled there. And ultimately—as indicated by the passage from MN 111 cited in Chapter Six—when concentration has been mastered, it allows you to observe the fabrications at work in right concentration so that you can find the escape from them.

AN 5:28 provides a useful analogy for this step:

> "Just as if one person were to reflect on another, or a standing person were to reflect on a sitting person, or a sitting person were to reflect on a person lying down; in the same way, monks, the monk has his theme of reflection well in hand, well attended to, well-pondered, well-tuned [well-penetrated] by means of discernment." — *AN 5:28*

When you can step back from the mind in concentration—without destroying the concentration—you can observe what it is already doing well and what it needs to do to make further progress.

The remaining three steps in this tetrad are exercises in consciously making the state of your mind more skillful in response to what you have observed in step 9. Step 10 is concerned primarily with motivating and energizing the mind; step 11 with making it more solid and unified. As we noted in the preceding chapter, "release" in step 12 can cover anything from temporary release from unskillful states, through the gradations of release experienced when going from a lower to a higher stage of concentration, all the way to total release from suffering and stress.

In some cases, steps 10–12 overlap. For instance, when you gladden the mind by breathing in a way that fosters rapture and pleasure (steps 5 and 6), that also has the effect of steadying the mind while at the same time releasing it from sensuality and other unskillful qualities. When you use a subsidiary theme in line with the instructions in SN 47:10 to bring the mind to a better mood, that can have a similar three-way effect. In other cases, steps 10 and 11 balance each other out: Step 10 can pertain to instances where you want to give the mind more energy; step 11, to those where you want to calm the energy down.

There are two major strategies for training the mind in these steps. The first is to stay focused on the breath, using the other tetrads or other techniques related to the four frames of reference to accomplish the aim of each training. The other strategy is to follow the advice of SN 47:10 in looking for themes outside of the four frames to provide subsidiary help.

In terms of the first strategy, we have already noted that it's possible to use steps 5 and 6 in accomplishing steps 10–12. Step 8, calming feeling and perception, can also help with the same steps. Step 3, being sensitive to the entire body, can in some cases help steady the mind in step 11 by giving it a broad grounding. Some people, however, find the larger frame of awareness too distracting when first focusing on the breath, in which case it's better, for the time being, to keep the range of awareness more restricted.

The strategies for taking the mind through the various levels of jhāna can also help accomplish the steps in this tetrad. For example, we have already noted the passages where—once you have succeeded in remaining focused on the body (breath) in and of itself—you are directed to stay with the body but not think thoughts concerned with the body (MN 125). This gladdens, steadies, and releases the mind by taking it from the first to the second jhāna. Similarly, if you have been using a subsidiary theme to steady the mind, the act of bringing the mind back to the breath or to any of the other frames of reference helps release it from the need to keep directing attention toward that theme. This can also bring you to the second jhāna.

The same principle applies to the act of taking the mind through the various levels of jhāna and the formless attainments—gladdening it in the first three jhānas; and calming, steadying, and releasing it from increasingly subtle levels of affliction as you go through the entire sequence.

> Ven. Sāriputta: "There is the case where a monk… enters & remains in the first jhāna… If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *sensuality*, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain would arise in a healthy person for his affliction, in the same way, the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an

affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how unbinding is pleasant.

"And further, there is the case where a monk… enters & remains in the second jhāna… If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *directed thought,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the third jhāna… If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *rapture,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the fourth jhāna… If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *equanimity,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *form,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of space,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness,* that is an affliction for him.…

"[He]… enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of nothingness,* that is an affliction for him.…

"And further, there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his effluents are completely ended." —*AN 9:34*

The steps of observing and adjusting the mind apply not only to the act of moving the mind from one level of jhāna to another, but also to the act of supervising it while it stays in a particular level. We have already noted, in the passage from AN 9:36, how this sort of supervising can lead the meditator all the way to release. The same act of supervision, however, can be used simply to ensure that unskillful mental states such as pride and conceit don't accrete around your attainments.

"And further, a person of no integrity… enters & remains in the first jhāna… He notices, 'I have gained the attainment of the first jhāna, but these other monks have not gained the attainment of the first jhāna.' He exalts himself for the attainment of the first jhāna and disparages others. This is the quality of a person of no integrity.

"But a person of integrity notices, 'The Blessed One has spoken of non-fashioning even with regard to the attainment of the first jhāna, for by whatever means they construe it, it becomes otherwise from that.' [In

> other words, whatever the ground on which you might base a state of becoming—a sense of your self and the world you inhabit—by the time that state of becoming has taken shape, the ground has already changed.] So, giving priority to non-fashioning, he neither exalts himself for the attainment of the first jhāna nor disparages others. This is the quality of a person of integrity. [Similarly with the other attainments up through the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.]" —*MN 113*

This would count as a strategy for steadying and releasing the mind.

These are a few of the ways in which the four frames of reference can be used to accomplish the trainings in this tetrad.

As for *the subsidiary themes* that can be helpful in this way, four main groups stand out.

First are the five themes that MN 62 lists as preparatory exercises for breath meditation. Two of these—the contemplations of inconstancy and not-self—will be treated under the fourth tetrad. Here we will simply note MN 137's statement that the perception of inconstancy can lead the mind either to joy or to equanimity. When you're faced with unpleasant experiences, the perception of inconstancy can make them more bearable; when you're faced with pleasant experiences, it can help loosen your tendency to become a slave to them. These are two ways in which this perception can gladden the mind. When the same perception leads to equanimity in either case, that would be an example of using it to steady the mind.

As for the remaining three preparatory exercises listed in MN 62, these are: meditation in tune with the five physical properties, meditation on the unattractiveness of the body, and the development of the four brahmavihāras.

Meditation in tune with the physical properties is an exercise in developing patience, tolerance, and equanimity in the face of painful and pleasant distractions. In each case, you aspire to make the mind non-reactive to agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions in the same way that the properties of earth, water, wind, fire, and space don't react with disgust when coming into contact with disgusting things.

For instance, earth:

> "Rāhula, develop the meditation in tune with earth. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with earth, agreeable & disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as when people throw what is clean or unclean on the earth—feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood—the earth is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with earth, agreeable & disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind." —*MN 62*

This is a useful exercise in steadying and releasing the mind. The fact that it's listed as a preliminary exercise to the more proactive steps of breath meditation makes an important point about the role of non-reactivity in the practice. Instead of being a self-sufficient practice, non-reactivity functions as a prerequisite for the steady powers of observation that are needed to fabricate changes in body, speech, and mind in an increasingly skillful and effective way.

Meditation on the unattractiveness of the body is a technique for overcoming lust, pride, and other unskillful attitudes related to the body. It is so basic to the practice that the tradition has developed of teaching it to every new candidate for ordination. Because this theme is useful primarily for inducing dispassion, we will discuss it under the fourth tetrad. Here it's enough to note that this, too, is a practice for steadying and releasing the mind.

The brahmavihāras are exercises in developing attitudes of good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity for all beings without limit. A standard description of these exercises is this:

> "That disciple of the noble ones—thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful—keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the awareness-release *[ceto-vimutti]* through good will is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.
>
> "[Similarly with compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.]" —*SN 42:8*

These exercises can both gladden and steady the mind. The reference to the resulting state of mind as an "awareness-release" calls attention to the fact that they fall under step 12 as well. As a set, they free the mind, at least temporarily, from passion (AN 2:30). Each attitude can also be used to release the mind from specific unskillful states. Good will provides an escape from ill will; compassion from harmfulness; and empathetic joy from resentment. MN 62 states that equanimity frees the mind from passion; AN 6:13, that it frees the mind from irritation.

However, even though the brahmavihāras are often described as awareness-releases, they are never described as discernment-releases. This means that, on their own, they cannot release the mind from ignorance (AN 2:30); they are not a sufficient practice for bringing about total release—a point dramatically made in MN 97. There Ven. Sāriputta teaches the brahmavihāras to a dying brahman, Dhanañjānin, who upon death is reborn in a brahmā world. Later, when Ven. Sāriputta goes to see the Buddha, the latter chastises him for leading Dhanañjānin to rebirth in an "inferior" brahmā world and not further, to the noble attainments.

A similar point is made by discourses describing the way in which brahmavihāra practice can give rise to the jhānas. The fact that these attitudes can induce strong states of concentration is another way in which they can gladden, steady, and release the mind all at once. However, they differ with regard to the level of jhāna they can induce. AN 4:125, when read in conjunction with AN 4:123, implies that the development of immeasurable good will can lead only to the first jhāna, and that the remaining attitudes developed as immeasurable states can lead, respectively, only to the second, third, and fourth jhānas. This apparently applies to these attitudes when developed on their own,

for SN 46:54 states that when they are developed in conjunction with the seven factors for awakening "dependent on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and resulting in letting go," then good will can lead as far as the "beautiful," a visionary meditative state, the third of the eight emancipations *(vimokkha*—see Appendix Three). The remaining immeasurable states can lead, respectively, to the first three formless attainments, which are also the fourth, fifth, and sixth of the eight emancipations.

However, the same discourse leaves open the possibility that this combination of the brahmavihāras with the seven factors for awakening can lead to a still higher release, which apparently means any of the stages of awakening. So again, the brahmavihāras are not, as is sometimes said, a self-sufficient practice for awakening. On their own, as aids in step 12, they can lead to temporary release but not total release. They need the help of the seven factors of awakening to go further than the jhānas.

The second group of subsidiary themes that help with the trainings in the third tetrad consists of the six recollections: recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, virtue, generosity, and the devas. These recollections serve primarily to gladden the mind, although the first three can also release the mind from fear (SN 11:3).

> "[1] There is the case where you recollect the Tathāgata: 'Indeed, the Blessed One is pure & rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine & human beings, awakened, blessed.'
>
> "[2] And further, there is the case where you recollect the Dhamma: 'The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here-&-now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the observant for themselves.'
>
> "[3] And further, there is the case where you recollect the Saṅgha: 'The Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well… who have practiced straight-forwardly… who have practiced methodically… who have practiced masterfully—in other words, the four types [of noble disciples] when taken as pairs, the eight when taken as individual types—they are the Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples: worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, the incomparable field of merit for the world.'
>
> "[4] And further, there is the case where you recollect your own virtues: '(They are) untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration.'
>
> "[5] And further, there is the case where you recollect your own generosity: 'It is a gain, a great gain for me, that—among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness—I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, openhanded, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms.'
>
> "[6] And further, you should recollect the devas: 'There are the devas of the Four Great Kings, the devas of the Thirty-three, the devas of the

> Hours, the Contented Devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who rule over the creations of others, the devas of Brahmā's retinue, the devas beyond them. Whatever *conviction* they were endowed with that—when falling away from this life—they re-arose there, the same sort of conviction is present in me as well. Whatever *virtue*… Whatever *learning*… Whatever *generosity*… Whatever *discernment* they were endowed with that—when falling away from this life—they re-arose there, the same sort of discernment is present in me as well.'" —*AN 11:12*

As the Buddha notes with regard to anyone who recollects any of these themes:

> "One's mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. One's mind heads straight, based on [that theme]. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. In one who is glad, rapture arises. In one whose mind is enraptured, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed senses pleasure. In one sensing pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated.
>
> "Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the devas while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children." —*AN 11:12*

The third group of subsidiary themes that help with the trainings in the third tetrad is the set of nine perceptions listed in AN 10:60. Because these perceptions deal more directly with issues in the fourth tetrad and DN 22, we will save their discussion for the next section in this chapter and for Chapter Nine. Here, however, it's relevant to note that these perceptions are useful primarily for steadying the mind, although MN 137's statement with regard to the perception of inconstancy can apply to all nine of these perceptions: that they can help gladden the mind as well.

The fourth group of subsidiary themes that help with the trainings in the third tetrad consists of the various exercises surrounding mindfulness of death. These are obviously aimed at steadying the mind by chastening it, and at releasing it from laziness and heedlessness, from attachment to the body, and from the petty concerns of daily life. However, they can also be used to gladden the mind by inspiring a sense of appreciation for every opportunity to practice, and for whatever progress you have already made.

> Then another monk addressed the Blessed One, "I, too, develop mindfulness of death.… I think, 'O, that I might live for the interval that it takes to breathe out after breathing in, or to breathe in after breathing out, that I might attend to the Blessed One's instructions. I would have accomplished a great deal.'" —*AN 6:19*

> "There is the case where a monk, as day departs and night returns, reflects: 'Many are the [possible] causes of my death. A snake might bite

> me, a scorpion might sting me, a centipede might bite me. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me. Stumbling, I might fall; my food, digested, might trouble me; my bile might be provoked, my phlegm… piercing wind forces [in the body] might be provoked. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me.'
>
> "Then the monk should investigate: 'Are there any evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by me that would be an obstruction for me were I to die in the night?' If, on reflecting, he realizes that there are evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him were he to die in the night, then he should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head, in the same way the monk should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities.
>
> "But if, on reflecting, he realizes that there are no evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him were he to die in the night, then for that very reason he should dwell in rapture & gladness, training himself day & night in skillful qualities.
>
> "[Similarly when night departs and day returns.]" —*AN 6:20*

By way of encouragement, the Buddha notes that when mindfulness of death is developed in this way, it gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end. This thought, too, gladdens the mind.

When we reflect on these four groups of subsidiary themes, three points stand out. The first is that, in every case, their practice is a form of mindfulness. Some of them are explicitly termed mindfulness or—its near equivalent—recollection *(anussati).* Even the practice of immeasurable good will, although its name doesn't include the word "mindfulness," is termed a form of mindfulness in Sn 1:8. This is because the practice of this immeasurable attitude requires constantly keeping it in mind. The same observation applies to the remaining brahmavihāras as well.

The second point is that each subsidiary theme can fulfill more than one training. What's especially striking in this connection is the way in which a theme that might seem dismaying—such as mindfulness of death or the perception of inconstancy—can also be gladdening, depending on how you perceive the relationship of the theme to the particular problem you're facing. This shows the power of perception as a mental fabrication: It can take a potentially negative topic and turn it into a cause for joy.

The third point is that, as a group, these subsidiary themes bear in mind the three parts of right view: the right framework for viewing experience, an understanding of the motivation for adopting the framework, and knowledge of what should be done in light of the framework. The brahmavihāras, for instance,

fall under right resolve, which falls within the fourth truth within the framework of the four noble truths. As they are developed—the duty with regard to right resolve—they lead directly to right concentration. The six recollections and mindfulness of death provide motivation for sticking with the path. In this way they perform the duty of right mindfulness in keeping these three aspects of right view in mind. This is why, even though these exercises are subsidiary to breath meditation, they deserve to be classified under the third establishing of mindfulness for their role in developing states of mind that inspire and strengthen right effort, and lead to right concentration.

> *The fourth tetrad:* **"[13] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' [14] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion *[literally,* fading].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' [15] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' [16] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.'"**

When MN 118 relates the four tetrads to the four establishings of mindfulness, it connects this fourth tetrad to the abandoning of greed and distress. As we noted in the preceding chapter, this activity can apply to the act of abandoning unskillful mind states that threaten to distract you from the theme of your concentration practice, and to help develop dispassion for concentration itself when all other attachments have been abandoned.

However, MN 62 and AN 10:60 suggest that, even before that point, the contemplations associated with step 13 can help prevent misunderstandings that may grow up around the very first stages in the practice of concentration. This suggestion derives from the fact that MN 62 lists the development of the perceptions of inconstancy and not-self among the exercises to be done *before* you start breath meditation. It doesn't give any recommendations for how to develop the perception of inconstancy, but AN 10:60 does:

> "And what is the perception of inconstancy? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'Form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant.' Thus he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the five aggregates." —*AN 10:60*

MN 62 does, however, note what this perception is meant to accomplish: It helps to uproot the conceit, "I am." Because the total uprooting of this conceit doesn't occur until the attainment of arahantship, the question arises: Why is this contemplation presented as a preliminary exercise? The answer seems to be that it helps to serve as advance warning against perceiving the states of concentration induced by breath meditation as ends in and of themselves. After all, they are composed of aggregates, and aggregates are conditioned phenomena. At the same time, in light of MN 113, the perception of inconstancy

with regard to the aggregates serves as warning against developing pride around those states of concentration as well.

A similar principle seems to be at work in MN 62's recommendation of how to develop the perception of not-self prior to breath meditation. Its focus is on applying this perception to form: the body as felt from within. Here the discourse does give detailed instructions on how to follow this exercise. First it defines each of the five properties—earth, water, wind, fire, and space—in the same terms used in MN 140. Then, after each property, it states:

> "And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with [that] property and makes [that] property fade from the mind." — *MN 62*

Because, as we have seen, step 3 in breath meditation involves sensitizing the mind to the effect of the breath on these properties, this exercise would seem to warn against trying to use the breath energy to create a state of perfect physical health. It reminds you that the body is best regarded not as an end in itself but as a tool in the search for a higher happiness. This point, as we will see below, is reinforced by the perceptions of the body's unattractiveness and its drawbacks in leaving you open to the miseries of a wide variety of diseases.

Of course, these same contemplations of inconstancy and not-self can be used to develop dispassion for any topics that may threaten to distract you from the theme of the breath or from any of the establishings of mindfulness built around the breath. This is one of the ways in which, even in the early stages of meditation, the contemplation of inconstancy in step 13 leads naturally to the contemplation of dispassion in step 14.

AN 10:60, in its preface to breath meditation, lists a series of other perceptions that can perform the same function. We have already discussed the first—the perception of inconstancy—so here we will list just the remaining ones, beginning with the perception of not-self, which this discourse applies to the six sense media.

> [2] "And what is the perception of not-self? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'The eye is not-self; forms are not-self. The ear is not-self; sounds are not-self. The nose is not-self; aromas are not-self. The tongue is not-self; flavors are not-self. The body is not-self; tactile sensations are not-self. The intellect is not-self; ideas are not-self.' Thus he remains focused on not-selfness with regard to the six inner & outer sense media.…
>
> [3] "And what is the perception of unattractiveness? There is the case where a monk reflects on this very body—from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin, filled with all sorts of unclean things: 'In this body there are: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil,

saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, urine.' Thus he remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to this very body.…

[4] "And what is the perception of drawbacks? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling—reflects thus: 'This body has many pains, many drawbacks. In this body many kinds of disease arise, such as: seeing-diseases, hearing-diseases, nose-diseases, tongue-diseases, body-diseases, head-diseases, ear-diseases, mouth-diseases, teeth-diseases, cough, asthma, catarrh, fever, aging, stomach-ache, fainting, dysentery, grippe, cholera, leprosy, boils, ringworm, tuberculosis, epilepsy, skin-diseases, itch, scab, psoriasis, scabies, jaundice, diabetes, hemorrhoids, fistulas, ulcers; diseases arising from bile, from phlegm, from the wind-property, from combinations of bodily humors, from changes in the weather, from uneven care of the body, from attacks, from the result of kamma; cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination.' Thus he remains focused on drawbacks with regard to this body.…

[5] "And what is the perception of abandoning? There is the case where a monk doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of ill will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to any arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence.…

[6] "And what is the perception of dispassion? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, unbinding.'…

[7] "And what is the perception of cessation? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, unbinding.'…

[8] "And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved.…

[9] "And what is the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with all fabrications." —*AN 10:60*

The perceptions of inconstancy and not-self act as preliminaries to the subsequent perceptions in the list, for they help you view all ideas of self or world simply as processes of fabrication. Viewing them in this light makes it easier to abandon any attachment to them. In particular, the eighth perception in this list points to the connection between perceptions of self and perceptions of

world in the process of becoming. As AN 10:27 and 10:28 point out, to be a being requires nutriment; your sense of the world depends on where you look for and find nutriment. If you can see both your sense of self and your sense of the world as processes that are inherently stressful, then the act of abandoning seems less like a sacrifice of necessary nourishment, and more like the strategy for true happiness that it actually is.

As for the third and fourth perceptions—of the unattractiveness and drawbacks of the body—they also amplify the perceptions of inconstancy and not-self, providing vivid examples of the stress that comes with looking for happiness in things that are unreliable and lie beyond your control. However, these perceptions perform other functions as well. As we have already noted, they help to overcome lust. Sn 1:11 points out that they help overcome pride based on your appearance or race; AN 4:184, that they help overcome fear of death. And as we will see in Chapter Nine, they also provide a foundation for restraint of the senses.

The practice of developing these perceptions prior to the steps of breath meditation is an example of developing insight prior to tranquility. This is one of the ways in which insight helps lead to jhāna (AN 10:71). Learning to perceive things as processes of fabrication prior to taking on the sixteen steps makes it easier to master the steps concerning bodily and mental fabrication.

To perceive the processes of fabrication as being fueled by passion also makes it easier to understand how step 15 follows naturally on step 14. With the cultivation of dispassion, the processes are deprived of their fuel, so they simply disband and cease.

Step 16, focusing on relinquishment, is an essential step in the successful abandoning of any issue that threatens to distract the mind, from the beginning stages on up. You not only have to allow the distraction to cease; you also have to let go of any pride over or attachment to your success in allowing that cessation. This frees you to watch for any unskillful states that might arise immediately after the cessation of a particular distraction. The same principle also applies in the final stages of the practice, when you have to abandon passion both for the attainment of the deathless (AN 9:36) and for the path that brought you there.

In this way, the steps of this tetrad roughly parallel the duties with regard to the four noble truths. Step 13 deals primarily with comprehending stress so as to give rise to dispassion; step 14 develops dispassion to abandon the cause of stress; step 15 realizes cessation; and step 16 deals with the ultimate duty with regard to the path: When fully developed, it is to be relinquished.

> "Suppose a man were traveling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other.… Having gathered grass, twigs, branches, & leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, he would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands & feet. Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having hoisted it on my head

or carrying it on my back, go wherever I like?' What do you think, monks? Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?"

"No, lord."

"And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having dragged it on dry land or sunk it in the water, go wherever I like?' In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft.

"In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas." —*MN 22*

"When, having discerned as they have come to be, the origination, the disappearance, the allure, the drawbacks—and the escape from—these five faculties [the faculties of conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment], one is released from lack of clinging/sustenance, one is called an arahant." —*SN 48:5*

"This, monks, the Tathāgata discerns.… And he discerns what is higher than this. And yet discerning that, he does not grasp at that act of discerning. And as he is not grasping at it, unbinding *[nibbuti]* is experienced right within. Knowing, as they have come to be, the origination, disappearance, allure, & drawbacks of feelings, along with the escape from feelings, the Tathāgata, monks—through lack of clinging/sustenance—is released." —*DN 1*

PART THREE

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Slice of Mindfulness

The Buddha once stated that his comprehension of the four establishings of mindfulness was vast:

> "Sāriputta, suppose that I had four disciples with a 100-year life span, living for 100 years, and endowed with excellent mindfulness, retention, recall, & keenness of discernment. Just as an archer with a good bow—trained, dexterous, & practiced—could easily shoot a light arrow across the shadow of a palmyra tree, they—endowed with that great an extent of mindfulness, that great an extent of retention, that great an extent of recall, & that keenness of discernment—would ask me one question after another on the four establishings of mindfulness. And I, asked again & again, would answer. Answered, they would remember what I had answered, and they wouldn't counter-question me about it a second time more. Aside from eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring, aside from urinating & defecating, aside from relieving sleepiness & weariness, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata's Dhamma teaching, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata's phrasing of Dhamma statements, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata's quick-wittedness (in answering) questions; but those four disciples of mine, with their 100-year life span, living for 100 years, would die with the passing of 100 years." —*MN 12*

Although the main thrust of this passage concerns the extent of the Buddha's knowledge, it also makes an important statement about how vast the topic of right mindfulness is: Even with one hundred years of questioning, you couldn't exhaust it. This point is important to keep in mind as we look carefully at DN 22, for it's the longest of the many discourses contained in the Canon on the topic of right mindfulness. Many readers assume that because it is so long, it must constitute a self-sufficient and comprehensive treatment of the topic—that, aside from a few details, it contains all you really need to know about the establishings of mindfulness. Yet when we approach it from the background of what we have already learned about the relationship among right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—and about the role of fabrication in all sensory experience—we can't help but be struck by a curious lack: When mentioning the various categories to look for in the context of the four frames of reference, it says very little about what to *do* with them once they are noticed and discerned. In the terms of the standard satipaṭṭhāna formula, it says very little about the role of ardency in establishing mindfulness.

Now, if you view mindfulness as passive, receptive awareness, this lack is unimportant. The categories listed in the discourse are simply ways of noting experience in an impersonal way, reading no "I" into the process, allowing them

to arise and fall as they will. The fact that there are no explicit instructions as to what to do with them—especially in the section on feelings and mind states—is an implicit instruction in and of itself: You shouldn't do anything with them. Just watch them arise and pass away until you develop dispassion for them.

However, this interpretation doesn't fit in with what we have already learned from other discourses in the Canon: that mindfulness is an act of memory, and the establishing of mindfulness is an ardent, proactive process. It also doesn't fit in with the role of right mindfulness in relation to all the factors of the noble eightfold path—and to right effort and right concentration in particular. At the same time, this interpretation ignores the role of fabrication in every feeling and mental aggregate: If you view these things as simply arising for you to observe passively as they pass away of their own accord, you'll miss the hidden role that intention plays in actualizing them from the potentials of your past actions. This will blind you to important areas for the exercise of insight. This interpretation also ignores the need for the exertion of fabrication in developing dispassion for some of the causes of stress and suffering. And of course, if mindfulness were simply a matter of passive receptivity, it's hard to see why its ramifications would take more than 100 years to describe.

At the same time, the passive-receptive interpretation of mindfulness doesn't jibe with many passages in DN 22 itself, for a few parts of this discourse actually do give explicit directions as to what to do in a particular context. For instance, there are the proactive trainings in steps 3 and 4 of breath meditation, which are included under the topic of the body in and of itself as a frame of reference. There are also the perceptions of the unattractive parts of the body and of the future state of the body after death. Because these are painful practices (AN 4:163), they involve a great deal of effort to maintain (AN 4:14).

In other cases, some of the categories listed under the other frames of reference contain implicit duties. Under the topic of feelings in and of themselves, for example, three of the categories deal with feelings not of the flesh. These are the feelings divorced from sensuality that are experienced in jhāna practice. This means that they can be tasted only through the exertion of right effort.

Similarly with the topic of mind states: Many of the categories of mind states listed under this topic—such as the concentrated mind, the enlarged mind, and the released mind—refer specifically to the practice of right concentration. These too require right effort to attain.

And as for the topic of mental qualities, the categories of the five hindrances and the six sense media make clear reference to the abandoning of unskillful mental qualities; the category of the seven factors for awakening makes reference to the act of bringing these skillful mental qualities to the culmination of their development, an achievement that can't be accomplished simply through passive observation. As for the four noble truths, also listed under the topic of mental qualities, we know from the Buddha's first sermon that these four categories carry implicit duties—and there is no reason to assume that these duties don't apply here as well.

DN 22 also makes frequent reference, in a recurring refrain, to the process that SN 47:40 calls the development of the establishing of mindfulness. As we have already noted in Chapter Two, this is a proactive process requiring the development of all eight factors of the noble path.

So even though DN 22 only rarely makes explicit reference to the duties of ardency in the establishing of mindfulness, this should not be read as an implicit instruction to do nothing but passively observe. Instead, a careful reading of the text shows that its implicit message is something else entirely: that we have to look elsewhere for explicit instructions concerning the role of ardency in establishing mindfulness.

Had DN 22 been intended as a comprehensive explanation of right mindfulness, the lack of explicit instruction in this area would have been a clear defect in the discourse. However, the organization of the discourse suggests that that was not its intended role.

We can see this from the questions around which the discourse is structured. The Buddha's standard approach, when giving a talk to a large group of people, was to make a statement about a particular topic, and then to pose questions based on the statement. The body of the talk would then be presented as a series of answers to the questions. In this format, the questions control the range and depth of material to be covered, thus signaling the Buddha's intention as to what he thinks is useful or feasible to cover in that particular talk. In some talks, the questions cover everything in the introductory statement; in others, only a part. In this second group, the introductory statement sketches out the larger context of the topic, to show how the part covered in detail fits into a larger picture of the path.

DN 22 falls into this second group. The discourse begins with a statement of the full satipaṭṭhāna formula:

> **The Blessed One said: "This is a path going one way only for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of unbinding—in other words, the four establishings of mindfulness. Which four?**
>
> **"There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world."**

We will discuss this opening statement more fully in Chapter Ten, but here we will simply note that the questions the Buddha bases on this paragraph cover only a small slice of the material it presents:

> **"And how does a monk remain focused on the body in & of itself?"**
>
> **"And how does a monk remain focused on feelings in & of themselves?"**
>
> **"And how does a monk remain focused on the mind in & of itself?"**
>
> **"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves?"**
>
> **"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances?"**
>
> **"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates?"**

"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media?"

"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for awakening?"

"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths?"

In other words, the Buddha limits his attention to only one aspect of the satipaṭṭhāna formula: what it means to remain focused on any of the four frames of reference. No questions are raised about how to be ardent in any of these cases, or about how to subdue greed and distress with reference to the world. No questions are raised about how to use ardency in the stage of the development of the establishing of mindfulness. Nothing is said about an issue that looms large in MN 118: that of whether the last three frames of reference are to be used in the context of remaining focused on the body, or whether they function separately. Instead, attention is focused simply on explaining the range of categories that can fruitfully be kept in mind when directing alertness to any of the four frames.

Given what we know about mindfulness as the faculty of memory, as well as its place among the other factors in the path, we can understand from these facts how DN 22 is meant to be read: not as a guide to passive awareness, or a complete guide to right mindfulness, but as a list of recommended frameworks to keep in mind when trying to develop right mindfulness as a basis for right concentration. As for how to use ardency to shape experience so as to fit into these frameworks, or to deal with phenomena that arise in the context of these frameworks, DN 22 gives only a few implicit hints. Because the Buddha had given explicit instructions on these topics in other discourses, he would have expected his listeners to take the hint to refer to those discourses to fill in the blanks left in this one.

In the next chapter I will focus on the structure of the frameworks provided by DN 22 within the context of the general structure of the discourse as a whole, at the same time drawing on passages from the rest of the Canon to make explicit some of the duties for ardency that are implicit around and within those frameworks. By calling attention to some of the connections between the slice of mindfulness presented in DN 22 and the relevant material in other discourses, I hope to show the practical value of placing this discourse in its larger context and taking it, not as a guide to passive awareness, but as a guide to action. This entails, as the Buddha recommended in MN 95, penetrating its meaning and pondering its agreement with the rest of the Dhamma. The discussion in the next chapter is not intended to be comprehensive—the Buddha's remarks in MN 12, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, rule that out—but I do hope to give a sense of what can be gained by encompassing a somewhat larger slice of the topic than DN 22, on its own, contains.

CHAPTER NINE

A Structure for Ardency

DN 22 is organized as a "wheel": a style of presentation in which two or more variables are placed against one another, with all their possible permutations listed one by one. The most famous wheel in the Pāli Canon, of course, is the wheel of Dhamma in the Buddha's first sermon (SN 56:11), which is quoted above in Chapter Three. In that wheel, the four noble truths are set against the three levels of knowledge appropriate to each—knowledge of the truth, knowledge of the duty appropriate to the truth, and knowledge that the duty has been completed—with the text listing one by one all twelve of the resulting permutations.

Similarly, in DN 22 the four frames of reference for the act of remaining focused are set against three levels of how to apply ardency in the practice.

First, the establishing of mindfulness:

"There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

Second, the development of the establishing of mindfulness:

"Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. [Similarly with feelings, mind, and mental qualities.]

And third, a level of practice described in the following terms:

"Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' … 'There are feelings' … 'There is mind' … 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world."

DN 22 lists these three levels after every exercise included under the four frames of reference. Many commentators have missed the fact that these three levels are distinct, and instead have described them all as a single practice, with the last level understood to be a summary of the practice as a whole. There are, however, several reasons for viewing the three levels as separate.

The first is the most obvious: They are separated from one another by the word *or*. You do the first *or* the second *or* the third.

A second reason is that SN 47:40 lists the first two stages as separate stages, with the second building on the first. The third stage is obviously more advanced than the other two, for instead of having to subdue greed and distress with

reference to the world, a meditator on this level has become independent, not sustained by anything in the world.

A third reason is that many of the exercises mentioned under the first stage are incompatible with the practice described in the third. The first-stage exercises make heavy use of verbal fabrication and concepts of "I" and "me": "I will breathe in experiencing the entire body"; "I am walking"; "I am feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh"; "There is sensual desire present within me"; "Mindfulness as a factor for awakening is present within me"; and so forth. In the third stage, however, these concepts are dropped in favor of the simple observation, "There is a body," and so forth.

In fact, it's possible to see the three stages as moving in a direction of greater depersonalization as they also move toward subtler application of ardency and right effort. The first stage uses concepts of "I" and "mine"; the second, in looking for patterns of origination and passing away in the pursuit of right concentration, begins to drop those concepts; and the third fully abandons concepts of "I" and "mine" as it simply maintains mindfulness to the mere extent of remembrance of the frame of reference, not clinging to anything in any world inside or out.

This pattern parallels the three levels of right view. Mundane right view employs concepts of beings and worlds (MN 117); transcendent right view deals in more impersonal causal connections described in the four noble truths and their attendant duties; and the highest level of right view (SN 12:15) reduces all arising and passing away simply to the level of stress arising and passing away, which has the effect of reducing the four duties of the noble truths to one: comprehension to the point of letting go.

We have already discussed the first two stages of remaining focused on the four frames of reference in Chapter Two. However, it's important to note here that DN 22 expands on the first level in two important ways. The first is that it presents a large range of alternative exercises and categories for each of the four frames, which we will discuss in detail below. The second is that it introduces the possibility that these alternatives can be practiced internally, externally, or both.

> **"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. [Similarly with the other frames of reference.]"**

There are two ways of interpreting what it means to "remain focused externally." The first is that external focus is a matter of the psychic powers—"knowledge and vision" concerning the bodies and minds of other beings—gained in concentration:

> "There is the case where a monk remains focused internally on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. As he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, he becomes rightly concentrated there, and rightly clear. Rightly concentrated there and rightly clear, he gives rise to knowledge & vision externally of the bodies of others. [Similarly with the other frames of reference.]" —*DN 18*

Further evidence that external frames of reference are to be known through psychic powers is that the categories for remaining focused on the mind in the first stage of practice are identical with those listed for the psychic ability to read the minds of others (DN 2; AN 5:28).

The second way of interpreting external focus—and one more pertinent for most meditators—is that it's a matter of using your normal powers of memory and inference to reflect on the fact that what you are experiencing is common to all beings.

> "And further, a disciple of the noble ones considers this: 'I am not the only one subject to death, who has not gone beyond death. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are subject to death, have not gone beyond death.' When one often reflects on this, the path takes birth. One sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As one sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed." —*AN 5:57*

Whether you focus externally through psychic power or through inference, the primary purpose in either case would be to develop a sense of saṁvega for the universality of suffering and stress.

The fact that each exercise or list of categories in the first stage of the practice is followed by the statement that it can be used in the second stage as well—the development of the establishing of mindfulness—shows that each can play a role in the development of right concentration. This is an important point to notice, for as we will see, some writers have depicted a few of the exercises, such as the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body, as alternatives to jhāna. But when we look carefully at how these exercises are described in discourses aside from DN 22, we'll see that they don't have to be interpreted in that way at all.

As for the third stage of practice, this corresponds to the stage of concentration practice in which you remember to apply the principle of non-fashioning to whatever attainment you may have mastered (see the passage from MN 113 in Chapter Seven). In other words, you drop any sense of self around the attainment. In so doing, you are close to full release.

> "There is the case, monks, where a certain contemplative or brahman, with the relinquishing of speculations about the past and the relinquishing of speculations about the future, from being totally not determined on the fetters of sensuality, and from the surmounting of the rapture of seclusion [in the first jhāna], of pleasure not of the flesh [in the first through the third jhāna], & of the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain [in the fourth jhāna], thinks, 'I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!'
>
> "With regard to this, the Tathāgata discerns: 'This venerable contemplative or brahman, with the relinquishing of speculations about the past… thinks, "I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!" Yes, he affirms a practice conducive to unbinding. But still he clings, clinging to a speculation about the past or… a speculation about the future… or a fetter of sensuality… or the rapture of seclusion… or a pleasure not of the flesh… or a feeling of neither pleasure

nor pain. And the fact that he thinks, "I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!": That in itself points to his clinging.'

"With regard to this—fabricated, gross—there is still the cessation of fabrications. Knowing, 'There is that,' seeing the escape from it, the Tathāgata has gone beyond it." —*MN 102*

This third stage, then, can lead directly to total unbinding.

Most of the discussion in DN 22, however, focuses on the first stage of practice. In this context it treats the four frames of reference in order, listing various exercises and categories for analyzing each of the four frames: body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities in and of themselves. As we have already noted, many of these exercises and lists of categories make no explicit mention of how ardency functions with regard to them. To fill in this lack, the following discussion will draw material from other discourses to make more explicit the role of ardency in each case.

A. BODY

The topic of the body in and of itself covers six exercises: (1) the first four steps of breath meditation; (2) the practice of discerning whatever posture the body is in; (3) the practice of making yourself alert in all your physical activities; (4) the analysis of the body into 31 parts; (5) the analysis of the body into the four physical properties in every posture; and (6) the practice of visualizing a corpse in nine stages of decomposition, and reflecting that your body will unavoidably meet with the same fate. MN 117 lists all six of these exercises under the term, "mindfulness immersed in the body" *(kāyagatāsati).*

When discussing *the first exercise,* the four steps of breath meditation, DN 22 adds only two points to what we have already learned from MN 118. First, it adds an analogy for the practice.

"Just as a dexterous lathe-turner or lathe-turner's apprentice, when making a long turn, discerns, 'I am making a long turn,' or when making a short turn discerns, 'I am making a short turn'; in the same way the monk, when breathing in long, discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.…'"

The second point added by DN 22 is that this exercise can be developed in all three stages of the practice. This point is repeated for each of the first five exercises, and for each of the nine stages of decomposition listed in the sixth exercise.

The second and third exercises give practice in continuous alertness throughout the waking day. The second tells you to make a point of discerning the body's posture at all times.

"When walking, the monk discerns, 'I am walking.' When standing, he discerns, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he discerns, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he discerns, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it."

The third exercise suggests a more heightened exercise in alertness in that it tells you not just to "discern" but to "make yourself alert" in every activity.

> **"When going forward & returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward & looking away… when flexing & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe & his bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert."**

This third exercise is directly helpful in fostering right speech and right action as factors of the path, for only when you are alert to what you are doing can you successfully exercise restraint over your words and deeds. Because the development of the path comes under the fourth frame of reference, this is an example of how exercises in this first frame of reference relate directly to exercises in the other frames of reference.

Of the activities described in the second and third exercises, only two—talking and falling asleep—automatically entail leaving the first jhāna (SN 36:11). This means that they provide an excellent opportunity for strengthening the momentum of your concentration throughout the day, and also for making you more sensitive to when the mind is and is not in a concentrated state. As we will see, this is one of the exercises listed under the third frame of reference. So this is another example of the direct connection between exercises focused on the body and the activities described in the other frames of reference.

The fourth exercise in this first frame of reference is one we have already encountered in Chapter Seven, where the passage from AN 10:60 describes it as the perception of the unattractiveness of the body. As in the case of breath meditation, DN 22 adds an analogy to illustrate the nature of the practice.

> **"Just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain—wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice—and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, 'This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,' in the same way, the monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things.…"**

There are two controversies surrounding this practice. The first comes from SN 54:9, in which a group of monks who contemplate the unattractiveness of the body become so disgusted with their bodies that some of them commit suicide. The Buddha learns of this and, calling together the survivors from the group, encourages them to take up the sixteen steps of breath meditation to allay and dispel any unskillful states that may arise in the mind "just as when, in the last month of the hot season, a great rain-cloud out of season immediately disperses & allays the dust & dirt that have been stirred up."

Now, people who resist the theme of unattractiveness tend to focus on this passage as proof that the perception of unattractiveness is a dangerous and

unhealthy meditation theme. However, the discussion of painful practice in AN 4:163, read in conjunction with AN 4:162, shows that there are strong defilements that will respond only to themes of this sort. AN 4:162 identifies painful practice as pertaining to those who are strongly passionate, aversive, or delusional, and who perpetually experience pain and distress born of these defilements. AN 4:163 describes painful practice—which is apparently the practice appropriate for those of this nature—in these terms:

> "There is the case where a monk remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to the body, percipient of loathsomeness with regard to food, percipient of non-delight with regard to the entire world, (and) focused on inconstancy with regard to all fabrications. The perception of death is well-established within him." —*AN 4:163*

In other words, painful practice is one that focuses on unpleasant themes to bring the unruly mind under control. This means that the theme of the unattractiveness of the body is not to be avoided when needed; simply that it has to be used with discretion, and balanced with the more pleasant practices associated with the breath to keep the mind from going off course.

A second controversy surrounding the practice of focusing on the unattractiveness of the body as a meditation theme comes from a superficial reading of AN 4:163. In contrast to the above description of painful practice, the discourse describes pleasant practice with the standard formula for the four jhānas. Some writers have taken this as proof that there is an alternative path to awakening that does not involve the jhānas, in that the description of painful practice contains no reference to the jhānas at all. We will discuss this point in detail in Appendix Three, but here we can simply note that, according to the description in AN 4:163, both painful and pleasant practice require all five faculties, including the faculty of concentration, to put an end to the effluents. Because the faculty of concentration is defined with the standard formula for the jhānas (SN 48:10), that means that both sorts of practice need jhāna in order to succeed.

The fifth exercise in this first frame of reference is that of analyzing the body, in whatever posture, as being composed of the four physical properties. In Chapter Seven, we encountered two different ways of contemplating the four properties mentioned in MN 62: as models for patient endurance, and as a way of inducing the perception of not-self. Here the description is much shorter:

> **"Just as a dexterous butcher or butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, in the same way the monk contemplates this very body—however it stands, however it is disposed—in terms of properties: 'In this body there is the earth property, the water property, the fire property, & the wind property.'"**

What's distinctive about this description of property-meditation is its emphasis on applying this analysis to the body as it's being experienced in the present, and not in the abstract. However, because we know from MN 62 and other discourses that this contemplation can serve a variety of skillful purposes, we can see that this is obviously a case where the description in DN 22 is not

meant to be complete. The discourse simply discusses how to remain focused on the body in this way. How to use ardency in developing the contemplation has to be learned from other sources.

In MN 28, for instance, Ven. Sāriputta shows how the contemplation of the body in terms of properties can be used to develop not only patient endurance and the perception of not-self, but also a sense of urgency and courage in the practice. Taking each property one by one, he first notes that the external instances of the property, even though much vaster than its internal instances in your body, are subject to radical change. So why shouldn't the internal instances be subject to similar changes? This reflection leads to a sense of not-self with regard to the body. For example, this is what Ven. Sāriputta notes with regard to the fire property:

> Ven. Sāriputta: "Now there comes a time, friends, when the external fire property is provoked and consumes village, town, city, district, & country; and then, coming to the edge of a green district, the edge of a road, the edge of a rocky district, to the water's edge, or to a lush, well-watered area, goes out from lack of sustenance. There comes a time when people try to make fire using a wing-bone & tendon parings.
>
> "So when even in the external fire property—so vast—inconstancy will be discerned, destructibility will be discerned, a tendency to decay will be discerned, changeability will be discerned, then what of this short-lasting body, sustained by clinging, is 'I' or 'mine' or 'what I am'? It has here only a 'no.'" —*MN 28*

In the next step, Ven. Sāriputta notes that reflecting on the body as composed of properties helps to depersonalize any painful verbal or physical attacks, allowing you to bear that contact with more patient endurance, and stirring the mind to develop heightened persistence, mindfulness, and concentration.

> Ven. Sāriputta: "Now if other people insult, malign, exasperate, & harass a monk [who has discerned this], he discerns that 'A painful feeling, born of ear-contact, has arisen within me. And that is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact.' And he sees that contact is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, consciousness is inconstant. His mind, with that property as its object/support, leaps up, grows confident, steadfast, & released.
>
> "And if other people attack the monk in ways that are undesirable, displeasing, & disagreeable—through contact with fists, contact with stones, contact with sticks, or contact with knives—the monk discerns that 'This body is of such a nature contacts with fists come, contacts with stones come, contacts with sticks come, & contacts with knives come. Now the Blessed One has said, in his exhortation of the simile of the saw, "Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding." [See MN 21.] So my persistence will be aroused & untiring, my mindfulness established & unconfused, my body calm & unaroused, my mind centered & unified. And now let contact with fists come to this body, let contact with stones,

with sticks, with knives come to this body, for this is how the Buddha's bidding is done.'" —*MN 28*

Finally, Ven. Sāriputta notes that when you have used the contemplation of the properties to focus on developing skillful qualities of mind, this allows you to focus less on the pain of verbal and physical attacks, and more on your success in doing the Buddha's bidding. If you're unable to develop skillful equanimity, you feel mentally pained over that fact. This gives rise to a sense of heightened urgency in the practice. Once you're successful, you feel joy.

Ven. Sāriputta: "And if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established, he feels apprehensive at that and gives rise to a sense of urgency: 'It is a loss for me, not a gain; ill-gotten for me, not well-gotten, that when I recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established within me.' Just as when a daughter-in-law, on seeing her father-in-law, feels apprehensive and gives rise to a sense of urgency [to please him], in the same way, if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established, he feels apprehensive at that and gives rise to a sense of urgency: 'It is a loss for me, not a gain; ill-gotten for me, not well-gotten, that when I recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established within me.'

"But if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is established, then he is gratified at that. And even to this extent, friends, the monk has accomplished a great deal." —*MN 28*

As we will see in the next section, these feelings of mental pain and joy regarding your progress on the path are classed as "renunciation-based" feelings or feelings "not of the flesh." As MN 137 notes, these feelings should be developed to free the mind from ordinary "house-based" feelings, such as the typical response of outrage over physical or verbal abuse. What this means is that MN 28 gives practical advice in how to use contemplation of the properties to accomplish the general principle that MN 137 recommends. In this way, this passage from MN 28 also shows how focusing on the body as a frame of reference can connect directly with using feelings as a frame of reference as well.

So the contemplation of the properties is not meant to stop simply with the analysis of the body. As MN 62 and MN 28 show, you have to use ardency in directing your reflections based on this exercise to reap its full results.

The sixth exercise in this first frame of reference is actually a set of nine—contemplating the body in terms of nine stages of the decomposition of a corpse:

a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, & festering;

a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, being chewed by crows, being chewed by vultures, being chewed by hawks, being chewed by dogs, being chewed by hyenas, being chewed by various other creatures;

a skeleton smeared with flesh & blood, connected with tendons;

a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons;

a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons;

bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions—here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull;

the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells;

the bones piled up, more than a year old;

the bones decomposed into a powder.

In each case, the meditator—

applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.'

This exercise, like the fourth, is a painful one. It's a variation on recollection of death, which we discussed in Chapter Seven. Here the primary emphasis is on developing a sense of dispassion for the body and the pleasures associated with it. This exercise is also a good antidote for pride and for complacency. But as we also noted in Chapter Seven, it can also develop an appreciation for each moment you are able to practice. In this way, it can also lead to a sense of joy.

What's interesting about this exercise, in comparison with the other five in this first frame of reference, is that it's not focused simply on the present. It takes knowledge derived from the past and applies it to the future in such as way as to induce dispassion in the present. This highlights the role of mindfulness here as a function of memory: You remember what you have seen of other dead bodies and, extrapolating from them, keep in mind the fact that you're not exempt from the condition they have fallen into.

This reflection is not meant to stop with passive acceptance. It's meant as a spur to the practice. Many verses from the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā make this point in vivid terms:

Ven. Mahākāla:

This swarthy woman
[preparing a corpse for cremation]
    —crow-like, enormous—
breaking a thigh & then the other
    thigh,
breaking an arm & then the other
                arm,
cracking open the head,
    like a pot of curds,
she sits with them heaped up beside her.

Whoever, unknowing,
makes acquisitions

—the fool—
returns over & over
to suffering & stress.
So, discerning,
don't make acquisitions.
May I never lie
with my head cracked open
again. — *Thag 1:16*

Sister Nandā:

"Sick, putrid, unclean:
look, Nandā, at this physical heap.
Through contemplation of the foul,
develop your mind,
make it one, well-centered.

As this [your body], so that.
As that, so this.
It gives off a foul stench,
the delight of fools."
Considering it thus,
untiring, both day & night,
I, with my own discernment
dissecting it,
saw.
And as I, heedful,
examined it aptly,
this body—as it had come to be—
was seen inside & out.

Then was I disenchanted with the body
& dispassionate within:
Heedful, detached,
calmed was I.
Unbound. — *Thig 5:4*

It's by encouraging this sense of urgency and disenchantment that the contemplation of death, as the Buddha said (AN 6:19), leads ultimately to the deathless.

B. FEELINGS

Under the topic of feelings in and of themselves, DN 22 provides two lists for categorizing feelings as they occur. The first list simply covers the three kinds of feelings: painful, pleasant, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant. The second list breaks each of these three into two sub-categories: feelings of the flesh *(āmisa)* and feelings not of the flesh *(nirāmisa)*, arriving at six types of feelings in all. Feelings of the flesh are physical or mental feelings connected with sensuality; feelings not of the flesh are physical or mental feelings not connected with

sensuality, and instead associated with the practice of jhāna (SN 36:31). In each case, you're told to discern when you're feeling a feeling of whichever type.

> **"When feeling a painful feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a painful feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh.' When feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh.' When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh.'"**

Aside from stating that this way of viewing feelings can carry through all three stages of the practice, DN 22 has nothing more to say on the topic. This is apparently one reason for the common interpretation that you're not meant to do anything to induce one sort of feeling rather than another. You're simply to watch feelings as they happen to come and go of their own accord. This further has led to the interpretation of *satipaṭṭhāna* as an open receptivity that "avoids the two extremes of suppression and reaction."

However, the teaching on dependent co-arising shows that feelings don't just happen. As MN 101 makes abundantly clear, not all feelings are the results of old kamma. Many are the result of new kamma: what you're doing right now. And as SN 22:79 shows, even the potential for feeling resulting from old kamma has to be actualized by present fabrication. Every feeling is fabricated for the sake of having a feeling. This means that every feeling contains an intentional element. As a meditator you want to understand this intentional aspect of feelings and see this process of fabrication in action, which means that you can't view feelings simply as arising on their own. Otherwise you blind yourself to the insight needed for release.

At the same time, just as feelings don't just happen, they also don't just disappear. In their role as mental fabrications, they have causal consequences, shaping the mind in ways that can be either skillful or unskillful. So you have to trace not only where the feelings come from, but also where they lead.

Our normal reaction to painful feelings, in particular, is a serious problem. When experiencing physical pain, we often compound it by getting upset about it. The Buddha's analogy here is of a person shot by one arrow who then shoots himself with a second arrow. Then we try to escape the pain by pursuing sensual pleasure, for we see no other way to escape (SN 36:6). This is detrimental in two ways: We obsess over the feelings—both painful and pleasant—thus defiling the mind; and we often act in unskillful ways to obtain the pleasures we want, thus creating more bad kamma that will lead to further pain down the road.

The Buddha's solution is to develop an alternative escape from pain in a type of pleasure that doesn't involve sensuality: the pleasure of jhāna (MN 14). The discussion in DN 22 alludes to this fact in its statement that the practice of remaining focused on feelings in and of themselves can carry into the second stage of practice, the development of the establishing of mindfulness (SN 47:40).

This shows that it's meant to function within the context of the factors of the noble eightfold path—meaning further that it must accompany the practice of jhāna.

The mention of feelings not of the flesh is also an implicit statement of this fact. SN 36:31 defines pleasure not of the flesh as the pleasure experienced in the first three jhānas. Similarly, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh is equivalent to the feeling of equanimity not of the flesh experienced in the fourth jhāna (SN 48:38). Now, these feelings don't simply come on their own. They're a product of fabrication. They have to be induced. And as the standard similes for the practice of jhāna show, the feelings of pleasure not of the flesh experienced in the first three jhānas aren't simply induced; they're spread and suffused until they permeate and fill the entire body.

"Painful feeling not of the flesh" is nowhere defined in the Canon, but we can derive from the discourses two possible ways of understanding it. On the one hand, it could be the sense of mental displeasure experienced while engaging in the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body or the perception of death, which—as we have already noted—are painful ways to awakening (AN 4:163). On the other hand, a passage from MN 44 suggests that a painful feeling not of the flesh would be the distress that accompanies this thought: "O when will I enter & remain in the dimension that the noble ones now enter & remain in?" In other words, it's the feeling of distress you experience when contemplating how much you want to attain the goal and you haven't yet attained it. Another example of this sort of distress would be the reflection from MN 28, quoted above in the discussion of the contemplation of the properties of the body: "It is a loss for me, not a gain; ill-gotten for me, not well-gotten, that when I recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established within me."

Painful feelings of this sort are not to be avoided. In other words, you don't try to abandon your desire for the goal, for without that desire the path wouldn't come together. You try to learn how to use this desire skillfully as motivation to move further along the path, like the tension in a bowstring that provides the arrow with the force needed to fly. Only on reaching the goal can you abandon the painful feelings based on this desire, in favor of the rapture, joy, and equanimity that come once release has been attained.

So regardless of how you define it, painful feeling not of the flesh doesn't just happen. It, too, is a product of fabrication—a fabrication based on knowledge that forms part of the path.

With this typology of feelings in mind we can look more carefully at the Buddha's recommendations for how to regard feelings as factors in a causal process. To begin with, you look at how your practice induces pleasure, and what effect pleasant practice has on the mind. If the effect isn't negative, the pleasure isn't to be rejected. You don't load yourself down with pain simply to show that you can take it. But if pleasant practice does have a negative effect, the duty of ardency is to replace it with a more painful practice.

> "There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not fixated on that pleasure.…

> "And further, a monk notices this: 'When I live according to my pleasure, unskillful qualities increase in me & skillful qualities decline. When I exert myself with stress & pain, though, unskillful qualities decline in me & skillful qualities increase. Why don't I exert myself with stress & pain?' So he exerts himself with stress & pain, and while he is exerting himself with stress & pain, unskillful qualities decline in him, & skillful qualities increase. Then at a later time he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain. That is why, at a later time, he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain." —*MN 101*

Conversely, the Buddha's simile of the well-tuned lute (AN 6:55) show that if too much pain in the practice leads to restlessness, your persistence should be eased.

Here it's important to note that the Buddha encourages painful practice not for the sake of burning away old kamma. In fact, in an extended discussion in MN 101, he ridicules the idea that painful feelings could have this effect at all. Instead, he encourages you to follow a painful practice, when necessary, to abandon unskillful qualities as they manifest in the present, and to give rise to skillful mental qualities in their stead.

A second way of viewing feelings as factors in a causal process is connected with the active production of feelings not of the flesh. In addition to providing an alternative escape from ordinary pain, the act of developing feelings not of the flesh allows you to gain insight into the process of fabrication that gives rise to feelings, and into the obsessions ordinarily produced by feelings of the flesh. These insights help lead to release from those obsessions.

> Visākha: "But what is to be abandoned with regard to pleasant feeling? What is to be abandoned with regard to painful feeling? What is to be abandoned with regard to neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling?"
>
> Sister Dhammadinnā: "Passion-obsession is to be abandoned with regard to pleasant feeling. Resistance-obsession is to be abandoned with regard to painful feeling. Ignorance-obsession is to be abandoned with regard to neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling."
>
> Visākha: "Is passion-obsession to be abandoned with regard to all pleasant feeling? Is resistance-obsession to be abandoned with regard to all painful feeling? Is ignorance-obsession to be abandoned with regard to all neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling?"
>
> Sister Dhammadinnā: "No.… There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With that he abandons passion. No passion-obsession gets obsessed there. There is the case where a monk considers, 'O when will I enter & remain in the dimension that those who are noble now enter & remain in?' And as he thus nurses this yearning for the unexcelled liberations, there arises within him sorrow based on that yearning. With that he abandons resistance. No resistance-obsession gets obsessed there. There is the case where a monk,

> with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. With that he abandons ignorance. No ignorance-obsession gets obsessed there." —*MN 44*

This shows why feelings of the flesh are not simply to be accepted as they come. If you want to gain insight and release, you have to replace them with feelings not of the flesh to see what obsessions underlie them.

MN 137 makes a similar point in a discussion of mental feelings: joy, grief, and equanimity. It defines these feelings in somewhat different terms from the classification given in DN 22, focusing on the attitude, skillful or unskillful, that produces them. Ordinary "house-based" attitudes regard sensory pleasure as an acquisition or gain, and sensory pain as a loss. More skillful attitudes—based on renunciation—try to see the inconstancy of all things experienced through the senses. This can lead to renunciation-based grief: "O when will I enter & remain in the dimension that the noble ones now enter & remain in?" This is the same sentiment we just encountered as one of the possible meanings of painful feelings not of the flesh. However, when the perception of inconstancy has a deeper effect on the mind, it can lead to refined feelings of renunciation-based joy and renunciation-based equanimity.

Despite the difference in terms—"house-based" and "renunciation-based," rather than "of the flesh" and "not of the flesh"—the recommendations in MN 137 for gaining escape from house-based grief parallel those in MN 44 for gaining escape from pain of the flesh. Instead of replacing house-based grief with house-based pleasure, you first replace it with renunciation-based grief. You then take that grief as motivation to develop the joy that comes from insight, and then replace that joy with the more peaceful equanimity also coming from insight. So again, the sort of pain that leads to beneficial results is not to be avoided on the path. It's to be actively cultivated until it yields skillful pleasure and equanimity.

MN 137 then gives instructions on how to progress from ordinary equanimity to equanimity not of the flesh—by developing the formless attainments based on the equanimity found in the fourth jhāna—and then beyond that to the non-fashioning of any sense of self around even the highest levels of equanimity. This leads the practice of remaining focused on feelings in and of themselves from the first through the second to the third level of mindfulness practice.

We have already discussed these instructions in detail in Chapter Two. Here we can simply note how they relate to the fact that DN 22 includes feelings not of the flesh in its discussion of this frame of reference: By inducing equanimity not of the flesh, you're in a position to see any subtle unskillful mental states, such as the fashioning of a refined sense of self, that can develop around feelings—much more clearly than when simply experiencing feelings of the flesh. Only when you see these subtle states can you abandon them. Only when you abandon them can you gain release. This is why feelings not of the flesh have to be purposely developed as an essential part of the path.

C. MIND

DN 22's treatment of mind is similar to its treatment of feelings. It simply gives a list of mental states for you to discern when they are present. In this case, however, the states are listed in pairs. With one exception, each pair consists of an unskillful state and its skillful counterpart. As for the exception—a constricted mind and a scattered mind—both members of the pair are unskillful; they're paired because they represent two extremes between which you have to find a middle way to bring the mind to concentration.

There are eight pairs in all:

a mind with passion / a mind without passion
a mind with aversion / a mind without aversion
a mind with delusion / a mind without delusion
a constricted mind / a scattered mind
an enlarged mind / an unenlarged mind
a surpassed mind / an unsurpassed mind
a concentrated mind / an unconcentrated mind
a released mind / an unreleased mind

An example of the formula repeated for each pair is:

"When the mind is released, he discerns, 'The mind is released.' When the mind is not released, he discerns, 'The mind is not released.'"

Some of the terms in these pairs need to be defined. SN 51:20 identifies a "constricted" mind as one accompanied by sloth and drowsiness; a "scattered" mind as one stirred up by pleasing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. The term "enlarged" is used, together with "immeasurable / unlimited," in the standard description of the awareness generated in the practice of the brahmavihāras (SN 42:8). According to Ven. Anuruddha in MN 127, however, an enlarged mind is not immeasurable. Its range of awareness is larger than the body but still measurable, ranging in distance from the shade of a tree to the earth bounded by the ocean. A "surpassed" mind is apparently one that has been surpassed either in your own experience or when compared to the experience of those whose awakening is unsurpassed.

These pairs are not mutually exclusive. An unconcentrated mind, for instance, could be scattered with passion, aversion, and delusion all at once. A concentrated mind would also count as enlarged, and—depending on context—either surpassed or unsurpassed, released or unreleased. In other words, it might be unsurpassed in the context of your own experience, but surpassed by the mind of someone further along on the path. Similarly, a mind in the first jhāna would be released from sensuality, but unreleased from directed thought and evaluation, and so on.

The progression in the list of possible mind states exhibits a feature similar to the progression in the list of feelings. The first three pairs deal with issues pertinent to the mind in all activities; the last five, with issues pertinent to the practice of concentration. In getting the mind to settle down, the first issue to keep in mind is to avoid the extremes of sloth and sensuality. Then you remember to enlarge your awareness and to make the effort to surpass any

preliminary level of concentration so that you can bring it to the stillness of full concentration and release.

The implicit message here, as in the case of feelings, is that you are not simply to watch passively as any of these sixteen mind states arise willy-nilly. Instead, you use these pairs of contemplations to keep in mind the issues relevant to bringing the mind to concentration. This point is implicitly supported by the fact that, as with all the exercises and categories in DN 22, the act of keeping these categories in mind is meant to lead to the second stage of practice, where the establishing of mindfulness is developed through cultivating all eight factors of the noble path, including right concentration.

When we look outside DN 22, we find a wealth of explicit encouragement to bring the mind to balance and to replace unskillful mental states with skillful ones. We have already seen one example in Chapter One, in the passage used to define ardency and compunction (Iti 110). Here are two more:

> "There is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion, thinking, 'This desire of mine will be neither overly sluggish nor overly active, neither inwardly constricted nor outwardly scattered.' …
>
> "And how is desire overly sluggish? Whatever desire is accompanied by laziness, conjoined with laziness: This is called overly sluggish desire.
>
> "And how is desire overly active? Whatever desire is accompanied by restlessness, conjoined with restlessness: This is called overly active desire.
>
> "And how is desire inwardly constricted? Whatever desire is accompanied by sloth & drowsiness, conjoined with sloth & drowsiness: This is called inwardly constricted desire.
>
> "And how is desire outwardly scattered? Whatever desire is stirred up by the five strands of sensuality, outwardly dispersed & dissipated, this is called outwardly scattered desire.
>
> "[Similarly with the other bases of power: concentration founded on persistence, on intent, and discrimination.]" — *SN 51:20*

> "And what are the effluents to be abandoned by destroying? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence.
>
> "Reflecting appropriately, he doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of ill will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence.
>
> "Reflecting appropriately, he doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence.
>
> "Reflecting appropriately, he doesn't acquiesce to any arisen evil, unskillful qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. The effluents, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to destroy these things do not arise for him when he destroys them. These are called the effluents to be abandoned by destroying." — *MN 2*

Often this principle is stated as a matter of great urgency, in which one of the roles of mindfulness is to keep this urgency in mind and to stay narrowly focused on it.

> "And how is a monk skilled in reading his own mind? Imagine a young woman—or man—fond of adornment, examining the image of her own face in a bright, clean mirror or bowl of clear water: If she saw any dirt or blemish there, she would try to remove it. If she saw no dirt or blemish there, she would be pleased, her resolves fulfilled: 'How fortunate I am! How clean I am!' In the same way, a monk's self-examination is very productive in terms of skillful qualities [if he conducts it in this way]: 'Do I usually remain covetous or not? With thoughts of ill will or not? Overcome by sloth & drowsiness or not? Restless or not? Uncertain or gone beyond uncertainty? Angry or not? With soiled thoughts or unsoiled thoughts? With my body aroused or unaroused? Lazy or with persistence aroused? Unconcentrated or concentrated?'
>
> "If, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain covetous, with thoughts of ill will, overcome by sloth & drowsiness, restless, uncertain, angry, with soiled thoughts, with my body aroused, lazy, or unconcentrated,' then he should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head; in the same way, the monk should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities.
>
> "But if, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain uncovetous, without thoughts of ill will, free of sloth & drowsiness, not restless, gone beyond uncertainty, not angry, with unsoiled thoughts, with my body unaroused, with persistence aroused, & concentrated,' then his duty is to make an effort in establishing ['tuning'] those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the ending of the effluents." —*AN 10:51*

So the eight pairs of mind states listed under this frame of reference are not simply a catalog of states that might happen to present themselves randomly to passive awareness. They're categories of mind states to keep in mind as you ardently engage in the fabrications needed to bring the mind to concentration and, further, to the ending of the effluents.

D. MENTAL QUALITIES

Under the topic of the fourth frame of reference, DN 22 lists five sets of categories to keep in mind: the five hindrances, the five clinging-aggregates, the sixfold sense media, the seven factors for awakening, and the four noble truths. As we have already noted, the four noble truths and their duties form the overarching framework for understanding how right mindfulness should function. The remaining sets of categories fall under these truths and the duties

appropriate to them. The hindrances, as a cause of stress, are to be abandoned. The clinging-aggregates, as the primary example of the truth of stress, are to be comprehended to the point of dispassion. As for the sixfold sense-media, the discussion in DN 22 focuses on the fetters that arise in dependence on these media—fetters that as a cause of stress should be abandoned. The seven factors for awakening, as aspects of the path, are to be developed.

What this means is that these categories are intended as frameworks to keep in mind to guide your ardency in trying to fulfill the duties of the four noble truths. DN 22 gives no indication of when a particular framework might be more useful than another, but a few observations might be helpful here. The sixfold sense-media form the framework for the practice of restraint of the senses. The five hindrances and seven factors for awakening are most often treated as guides for what to abandon and what to develop when bringing the mind to concentration. The five clinging-aggregates are a useful framework for inducing dispassion in two circumstances: when you want to analyze any phenomena that would pull you out of concentration into greed and distress with reference to the world; and when you want to develop dispassion for the world of becoming created by the concentration itself. The four noble truths provide an overarching framework for the practice as a whole. As we noted, the description of right mindfulness in MN 117—in which mindfulness circles around the first five factors of the path to bring about right concentration—would count as an application of this framework. It also illustrates how this framework arches over the others in providing guidance in how to bring mindfulness to bear on every part of the path.

It would be impossible to list all the ways in which these frameworks can be put to use. The following discussion is meant simply to provide a few suggestions for further inquiry.

The five hindrances are obstacles to concentration. They are: sensual desire, ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty. The discussion of these hindrances under this fourth frame of reference lists five things to notice with regard to each hindrance: when it is present; when it is absent; how it arises; how—once arisen—it is abandoned; and how there will be no future arising of it once it has been abandoned. This last point refers to the stage of the practice when that particular hindrance is gone for good. If we identify the hindrances simply as hindrances to concentration, this stage would be stream entry in the case of uncertainty, and non-return in every other case, for non-return is the level of awakening where concentration is fully mastered (AN 3:85 [Thai: 3:87]). If we identify the hindrances with the deeper and subtler fetters that share their names, then uncertainty would be overcome with stream entry; sensuality and ill will with non-return; and restlessness with arahantship (MN 118; AN 10:13).

In either interpretation, this framework can be used all the way from the beginning stages of concentration practice to the transcendent attainments.

The formula for each hindrance follows a standard pattern. Here is the formula for sensual desire:

> **"There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns, 'There is sensual desire present within me.' Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns, 'There is no sensual desire present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of**

unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of sensual desire that has been abandoned."

SN 46:51 gives an overall account of how to use appropriate attention to starve the hindrances.

> "Now, what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *sensual desire,* or for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen? There is the theme of unattractiveness. To foster appropriate attention to it: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen sensual desire, or for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen.
>
> "And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *ill will,* or for the growth & increase of ill will once it has arisen? There is the release of the mind [through good will, compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity]. To foster appropriate attention to that: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen ill will, or for the growth & increase of ill will once it has arisen.
>
> "And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *sloth & drowsiness,* or for the growth & increase of sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen? There is the potential for effort, the potential for exertion, the potential for striving. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen sloth & drowsiness, or for the growth & increase of sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen.
>
> "And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *restlessness & anxiety,* or for the growth & increase of restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen? There is stillness of awareness. To foster appropriate attention to that: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen restlessness & anxiety, or for the growth & increase of restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen.
>
> "And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *uncertainty,* or for the growth & increase of uncertainty once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen uncertainty, or for the growth & increase of uncertainty once it has arisen." — *SN 46:51*

Many discourses give further instructions for bringing appropriate attention to the potentials that starve specific hindrances. Here are some instructions for dealing with drowsiness:

> Once the Blessed One was living among the Bhaggas in the Deer Park at Bhesakaḷā Grove, near Crocodile Haunt. At that time Ven. MahāMoggallāna [prior to his awakening] sat nodding near the village of Kallavālaputta, in Magadha. The Blessed One saw this with his purified divine eye, surpassing the human, and as soon as he saw this—just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—disappeared from the Deer Park… appeared right in front of Ven. MahāMoggallāna, and sat down on a prepared seat. As he was sitting

there, the Blessed One said to Ven. MahāMoggallāna, "Are you nodding, Moggallāna? Are you nodding?"

"Yes, lord."

"Well then, Moggallāna, whatever perception you have in mind when drowsiness descends on you, don't attend to that perception, don't pursue it. It's possible that by doing this you will shake off your drowsiness.

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then recall to your awareness the Dhamma as you have heard & memorized it, re-examine it & ponder it over in your mind.…

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then repeat aloud in detail the Dhamma as you have heard & memorized it. It's possible that by doing this you will shake off your drowsiness.

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then pull both you earlobes and rub your limbs with your hands.…

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then get up from your seat and, after washing your eyes out with water, look around in all directions and upward to the major stars & constellations.…

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then attend to the perception of light, resolve on the perception of daytime, [dwelling] by night as by day, and by day as by night. By means of an awareness thus open & unhampered, develop a brightened mind.…

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then—percipient of what lies in front & behind—set a distance to meditate walking back & forth, your senses inwardly immersed, your mind not straying outwards.…

"But if by doing this you don't shake off your drowsiness, then—reclining on your right side—take up the lion's posture, one foot placed on top of the other, mindful, alert, with your mind set on getting up. As soon as you wake up, get up quickly, with the thought, 'I won't stay indulging in the pleasure of lying down, the pleasure of reclining, the pleasure of drowsiness.'

"That, Moggallāna, is how should you train yourself." — *AN 7:58*

The five clinging-aggregates form the summary definition of stress under the first noble truth. They are: the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, and the consciousness clinging-aggregate. The term "aggregate" *(khandha)* can also mean "group" or "mass." Some authors have defined the aggregates as the constituent parts of what makes a person, but this is a mistake, for the Buddha said explicitly that they are not to be seen as "what I am" (SN 22:59). Instead, they are better defined as the elements of experience that form the raw material from which we create a sense of self (SN 22:2): what the Buddha calls "I-making" and "my-making." Without clinging, these aggregates are neutral. With clinging, they're stressful (SN 22:48).

SN 22:79 defines the individual aggregates, not with nouns, but with verbs, indicating that all of them—including form (physical phenomenon; the body as felt from within)—are best regarded as activities.

> "And why do you call it 'form' *[rūpa]?* Because it is afflicted *[ruppati],* thus it is called 'form.' Afflicted with what? With cold & heat & hunger & thirst, with the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles.…
>
> "And why do you call it 'feeling'? Because it feels, thus it is called 'feeling.' What does it feel? It feels pleasure, it feels pain, it feels neither pleasure nor pain.…
>
> "And why do you call it 'perception'? Because it perceives, thus it is called 'perception.' What does it perceive? It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white.…
>
> "And why do you call them 'fabrications'? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called 'fabrications.' What do they fabricate as a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood… For the sake of fabrication-hood… For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing.…
>
> "And why do you call it 'consciousness'? Because it cognizes, thus it is called consciousness. What does it cognize? It cognizes sour, it cognizes bitter, it cognizes pungent, it cognizes sweet, it cognizes alkaline, it cognizes non-alkaline, it cognizes salty, it cognizes unsalty." — *SN 22:79*

On the surface, this passage doesn't draw an obvious distinction between the aggregates of perception and consciousness. However, there may be some significance in the fact that consciousness is illustrated with an example from the more passive sense of taste, and perception with an example from the more active sense of sight. Consciousness is somewhat more passive than perception in that its main duty is to register the presence of a phenomenon at the senses; perception is more active in labeling it and giving it a meaning (MN 18).

The Canon contains many instructions for how to comprehend the clinging-aggregates to the point of dispassion. DN 22 recommends which aspects of the clinging-aggregates should be kept in mind when doing this:

> **"There is the case where a monk (discerns): 'Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling… Such is perception… Such are fabrications… Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.'"**

In other words, you look for what the aggregates are, how they are caused, and how they disappear. The word "such" in this formula seems to indicate a direct observation of these aggregates as they are happening. SN 22:5 connects this level of direct observation to the practice of concentration:

> "Develop concentration, monks. A concentrated monk discerns things as they have come to be. And what does he discern as it has come to be?

> "The origination & disappearance of form… of feeling… of perception… of fabrications… of consciousness.
>
> "And what is the origination of form… of feeling… of perception… of fabrications… of consciousness? There is the case where one relishes, welcomes, & remains fastened. To what? One relishes form, welcomes it, & remains fastened to it. While one is relishing form, welcoming it, & remaining fastened to it, delight arises. Any delight in form is clinging. With that clinging as a condition there is becoming. With becoming as a condition there is birth. With birth as a condition then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all come into play. Thus is the origination of this entire mass of suffering & stress. [Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]
>
> "And what is the disappearance of form… of feeling… of perception… of fabrications… of consciousness? There is the case where one does not relish, welcome or remain fastened. To what? One does not relish form, welcome it, or remain fastened to it. While one is not relishing form, welcoming it, or remaining fastened to it, one's delight in form ceases. From the cessation of that delight, clinging ceases. From the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases. From the cessation of becoming, birth ceases. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering & stress. [Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]" — *SN 22:5*

As Ven. Sāriputta notes in SN 22:85, when a meditator analyzes experience into aggregates in this way, he/she will develop a sense of dispassion for them, seeing them as inconstant, stressful, not-self, fabricated, and murderous. The ability to analyze distractions to concentration in this way would help strengthen the concentration by inducing disenchantment with any possible distraction. And as we have already seen in Chapter Three, in the passage from AN 9:36, this analysis can then be turned on the concentration itself, after it is mastered, to bring about total release.

The sixfold sense-media are the six senses (counting the mind as the sixth) and their respective objects. The senses themselves are called "internal"; their objects, "external." As DN 22 points out, the framework to keep in mind here consists not only of the senses, but also of the issue of how fetters arise in relationship to the senses.

Here the word "fetter" apparently doesn't denote the standard list of ten fetters, for several discourses—including SN 35:191–192—connect the sixfold sense-media particularly with the arising of the fetters of desire and passion.

> Ven. Sāriputta: "Suppose that a black ox and a white ox were joined with a single collar or yoke. If someone were to say, 'The black ox is the fetter of the white ox, the white ox is the fetter of the black'—speaking this way, would he be speaking rightly?"
>
> Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: "No, my friend. The black ox is not the fetter of the white ox, nor is the white ox the fetter of the black. The single collar or yoke by which they are joined: That is the fetter there."

> Ven. Sāriputta: "In the same way, the eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye. Whatever desire-passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds.… The nose is not the fetter of aromas.… The tongue is not the fetter of flavors.… The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations.… The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect. Whatever desire-passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there." — *SN 35:191*

The formula in DN 22 for each of the sense media parallels that for each of the five hindrances. You look for: when the fetter related to that sense is present; when it is absent; how it arises; how—once arisen—it is abandoned; and how there will be no future arising of it once it has been abandoned. And again, as with the hindrances, this last point refers to the stage of the practice when that fetter is gone for good, which means that this framework can be used all the way from the beginning stages of the practice to the attainment of arahantship, where the subtlest passions—for the form and formless phenomena experienced in the four jhānas and the five formless attainments—are abandoned once and for all.

Here is the formula for eye and forms:

> **"There is the case where he discerns the eye, he discerns forms, he discerns the fetter that arises dependent on both. He discerns how there is the arising of an unarisen fetter. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of a fetter once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of a fetter that has been abandoned."**

The formula doesn't indicate a particular context for practicing this frame of reference, but when we compare it to other passages in the discourses, it seems to fit best with the practice of restraint of the senses. The discourses contain many descriptions of this practice. The most interesting, from the point of view of the establishing of mindfulness, are those describing this practice as best based on mindfulness immersed in the body.

In Chapter One we have already encountered the simile from SN 47:20, in which mindfulness immersed in the body is depicted as the bowl of oil that a man has to stay focused on while exercising extreme restraint of the senses so that his head doesn't get cut off. Because, as MN 117 notes, "mindfulness immersed in the body" covers any of the six exercises mentioned under the first frame of reference, this would count as at least one instance in which you would be sensitive to the categories in the fourth frame of reference while staying focused on the exercises listed under the first.

Another passage makes the connection between these two exercises even more explicit:

> "And what is lack of restraint? There is the case where a monk, seeing a form with the eye, is obsessed with pleasing forms, is repelled by unpleasing forms, and remains with body-mindfulness unestablished, with limited awareness. He doesn't discern, as it has come to be, the

awareness-release, the discernment-release where any evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen utterly cease without remainder. [Similarly with the other sense media: ear, nose, tongue, body, & intellect.]

"Just as if a person, catching six animals of different ranges, of different habitats, were to bind them with a strong rope. Catching a snake, he would bind it with a strong rope. Catching a crocodile… a bird… a dog… a hyena… a monkey, he would bind it with a strong rope. Binding them all with a strong rope, and tying a knot in the middle, he would set chase to them.

"Then those six animals, of different ranges, of different habitats, would each pull toward its own range & habitat. The snake would pull, thinking, 'I'll go into the anthill.' The crocodile would pull, thinking, 'I'll go into the water.' The bird would pull, thinking, 'I'll fly up into the air.' The dog would pull, thinking, 'I'll go into the village.' The hyena would pull, thinking, 'I'll go into the charnel ground.' The monkey would pull, thinking, 'I'll go into the forest.' And when these six animals became internally exhausted, they would submit, they would surrender, they would come under the sway of whichever among them was the strongest. In the same way, when a monk whose mindfulness immersed in the body is undeveloped & unpursued, the eye pulls toward pleasing forms, while unpleasing forms are repellent. The ear pulls toward pleasing sounds.… The nose pulls toward pleasing aromas.… The tongue pulls toward pleasing flavors.… The body pulls toward pleasing tactile sensations.… The intellect pulls toward pleasing ideas, while unpleasing ideas are repellent. This, monks, is lack of restraint.

"And what is restraint? There is the case where a monk, seeing a form with the eye, is not obsessed with pleasing forms, is not repelled by unpleasing forms, and remains with body-mindfulness established, with immeasurable awareness. He discerns, as it has come to be, the awareness-release, the discernment-release where all evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen utterly cease without remainder. [Similarly with the other sense media.]

"Just as if a person, catching six animals of different ranges, of different habitats, were to bind them with a strong rope… and tether them to a strong post or stake.

"Then those six animals, of different ranges, of different habitats, would each pull toward its own range & habitat.… And when these six animals became internally exhausted, they would stand, sit, or lie down right there next to the post or stake. In the same way, when a monk whose mindfulness immersed in the body is developed & pursued, the eye doesn't pull toward pleasing forms, and unpleasing forms are not repellent. The ear doesn't pull toward pleasing sounds… the nose doesn't pull toward pleasing aromas… the tongue doesn't pull toward pleasing tastes… the body doesn't pull toward pleasing tactile sensations… the intellect doesn't pull toward pleasing ideas, and unpleasing ideas are not repellent. This, monks, is restraint.

"The 'strong post or stake' is a term for mindfulness immersed in the body." — *SN 35:206*

As we will see at the end of this chapter, when we discuss the relationships among the various frames of reference, there is every reason to believe that the pattern we observed in MN 118—that the last three frames of reference can be practiced while paying attention to the first—applies in DN 22 as well. The fact that restraint of the senses is best based on mindfulness immersed in the body—the stake or post that keeps it from running away—is an explicit illustration of this point.

The seven factors for awakening have already been discussed in Chapter Six. DN 22's main contribution to this topic is the formula it supplies for each factor. Because these factors are often presented as the skillful converse of the five hindrances, it's not surprising that the formula here is the converse of that for the five hindrances. You notice when the factor is present, when it is absent, how to give rise to it; and how—once it is arisen—there is the culmination of its development. For example:

> **"There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a factor for awakening present within, he discerns, 'Mindfulness as a factor for awakening is present within me.' Or, there being no mindfulness as a factor for awakening present within, he discerns, 'Mindfulness as a factor for awakening is not present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for awakening. And he discerns how there is the culmination of the development of mindfulness as a factor for awakening once it has arisen."**

Because the last point in this formula refers to the full development of the path, this frame of reference can be applied all the way from the beginning stages of concentration practice up to the threshold of awakening where the path reaches a point of culmination.

Just as SN 46:51 provides instructions for using appropriate attention to starve the hindrances, it also provides similar instructions for feeding the factors for awakening.

> "Now, what is the food for the arising of unarisen *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of mindfulness… once it has arisen? There are qualities that act as a foothold for mindfulness as a factor for awakening. [According to SN 47:16, these are well-purified virtue & views made straight; according to MN 118, they would include the qualities fostered by the sixteen steps of breath meditation.] To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of mindfulness… once it has arisen.
>
> "And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of qualities… once it has arisen? There are qualities that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen analysis of qualities as a factor for

awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of qualities… once it has arisen.

"And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *persistence* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of persistence… once it has arisen? There is the potential for effort, the potential for exertion, the potential for striving. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen persistence as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of persistence… once it has arisen.

"And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *rapture* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture… once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that act as a foothold for rapture as a factor for awakening. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen rapture as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture… once it has arisen.

"And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *calm* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of calm… once it has arisen? There is physical calm & there is mental calm. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen calm as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of calm… once it has arisen.

"And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *concentration* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of concentration… once it has arisen? There are themes for calm, themes for non-distraction [these are the four establishings of mindfulness]. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen concentration as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of concentration… once it has arisen.

"And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *equanimity* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of equanimity… once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that act as a foothold for equanimity as a factor for awakening. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen equanimity as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of equanimity… once it has arisen." — *SN 46:51*

Notice the way in which the feeding of some of the factors for awakening is identical to the starving of some of the hindrances. The act of feeding analysis of qualities is identical with the starving of uncertainty; the feeding of persistence is identical with the starving of sloth and drowsiness. The feeding of calm and concentration is nearly identical with the starving of restlessness and anxiety. This overlap is apparently one of the reasons why the seven factors are often presented as the converse of the hindrances.

As we have already noted with regard to rapture at the beginning of Chapter Seven, some of the instructions for feeding the factors for awakening in this passage are fairly opaque. These instructions are best read as a reminder that you have to learn how to observe from your own internal investigation and experience what the potentials for the factors for awakening might be, and to keep those observations in mind to develop them further.

The four noble truths are presented in DN 22 in great detail. When we compare the discussion here to the standard discussion of the four noble truths given in other discourses, two features stand out. The first is that terms left undefined in the standard formula for the first noble truth are here defined with many examples.

Even more important for the practice, though, is the second distinctive feature here: a long list under the second and third noble truths, showing where to focus attention to see craving arising and where to abandon it so that it will cease. As the list shows, the spots where craving arises are the same spots where you can develop the dispassion needed to abandon it. The list of spots is long, but it can be summarized as follows:

> the external sense media;
> the internal sense media;
> consciousness at the sense media;
> contact at the sense media;
> feeling born of that contact;
> perception of the external sense media;
> intention for the external sense media;
> craving for the external sense media;
> thought directed at the external sense media;
> evaluation of the external sense media.

All of these spots are factors or sub-factors in dependent co-arising. The first five are the immediate predecessors of craving in the standard sequence of conditions. Craving, of course, is craving itself. Feeling occurs both prior to contact, as a sub-factor of both fabrication and name-and-form, and after contact, as a factor on its own. The remaining factors occur prior to contact: perception, directed thought, and evaluation as sub-factors of fabrication; and intention as a sub-factor of name-and-form.

The message of this list is that craving can be abandoned at any of these spots. This list is thus an illustration of the principle set out in MN 9 and Sn 3:12: that knowledge in terms of the four noble truths can be applied at any spot in the causal sequence to bring it to an end.

The inclusion of directed thought and evaluation in this list also draws attention to the point discussed in AN 9:36, that dispassion for the aggregates can be developed by observing them in their role as constituent factors of jhāna. In fact, if we take craving as identical to desire—as the Buddha does in SN 42:11—then all of the factors of this list can be found in the list of constituent factors that Ven. Sāriputta discerns while practicing jhāna in MN 111: *directed thought, evaluation,* rapture, *pleasure,* singleness of mind, *contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire,* decision, persistence, mindfulness, *equanimity* (under *feeling),* & attention.

What's distinctive about the discussion in DN 22 is that it relates all of these factors and sub-factors to the six sense media, i.e., the "world" as defined in SN 35:82. To focus attention right at these factors means to regard them as events, in and of themselves, and not in terms of whatever sense of world might be created out of them. Because the worlds of becoming created by the practice of jhāna—and detected at the sixth sense, the intellect—would come under the word, *world,* this approach can be used to examine craving at contact not only at

the normal sensory level, but also at the level of the mind in right concentration, when you're in contact with the factors of jhāna.

To see these factors and sub-factors as events—divorced from any meaning that they might have in relation to any world, simply arising and passing away in line with the conditions of ignorance and fabrication—helps to instill a sense of dispassion for them. This dispassion undercuts the tendency for craving to arise right at these events—which means that this frame of reference is especially useful in subduing greed and distress both for the world outside one's concentration, and ultimately for the practice of concentration itself. In this, it parallels the steps of the fourth tetrad in MN 118, in which the contemplation of inconstancy leads ultimately to the contemplation of relinquishment of all fabricated phenomena, including the path.

E. FOUR IN ONE

DN 22 doesn't describe the practical relationship among these four frames of reference. This is in line with the limited range of questions framing the discourse: They focus simply on what it means to keep a particular framework in mind, without explicitly treating the other questions surrounding that framework within the standard satipaṭṭhāna formula. To get some idea of the relationship among these frames of reference, we have to look to other discourses.

In particular, it's useful to look to MN 118 for insight into this area. Three points from that discourse are worth investigating to see how they might apply here.

1) The first frame of reference forms the foundation for the other three. In other words, you can practice focusing on feelings, mind states, or mental qualities while being mindful and alert to the body in and of itself.

2) The fourth frame of reference is useful primarily for keeping unskillful mental states at bay. In other words, it frames attention in a way that's helpful for subduing greed and distress with reference to the world outside the focus of your concentration, and ultimately to the world of becoming induced by the concentration itself.

3) The practice of establishing mindfulness on any of the four frames of reference can bring the seven factors for awakening to the culmination of their development; and, through that culmination, lead to clear knowing and release.

When we compare these points from MN 118 to what we've observed in DN 22, we find that there are good reasons for seeing the same relations functioning here. This isn't necessarily the only way to understand the relationships among the four frames of reference in establishing mindfulness, but it is a good place to start in developing an understanding that both penetrates the content of DN 22 and ponders its meaning in its context within the rest of the Canon: the type of penetrating and pondering the Buddha recommends in MN 95 as prerequisites to the practice.

1) With regard to the first point, there are at least three reasons to believe that you can practice the last three frames of reference while staying focused on

any of the exercises listed in the first. The first reason is that the observations made in MN 118 relating the sixteen steps to the four establishings of mindfulness apply here as well: the various ways of focusing on the body all come under the topic of "body"; attention to the body would count as the intentional element contained in feeling; mindfulness of the body requires steady mindfulness and alertness; and the abandoning of greed and distress would be accompanied by the mental quality of equanimity, which is the last factor for awakening.

As we noted in Chapter Six, the formula for establishing mindfulness on the body in and of itself —"One remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world"—implicitly involves feelings, mind states, and mental qualities. The act of remaining focused on the body fabricates feelings; alertness and mindfulness are mind states; and the act of subduing greed and distress with reference to the world involves mental qualities. This means that establishing mindfulness on the first frame of reference provides a good opportunity to view the other three frames in action in a way that sees their causal interactions, while at the same time providing a "post or stake" to help keep those interactions from wandering off into distraction.

The second reason for viewing the act of establishing mindfulness on the body in and of itself as a foundation for the other three establishings of mindfulness is that DN 22 gives specific mindfulness exercises only under the first frame of reference; the remaining frames simply list categories of events to discern as they occur. Again, as SN 35:206 notes, the exercise of staying with the body as a frame of reference provides an excellent grounding—a strong stake or post—to keep the mind from getting pulled away by any meanings attributed to feelings or by the content of mental states. Mindfulness of the body keeps your focus firmly grounded in a spot where feelings, mind states, and mental qualities can be observed simply as actions or events without reference to meaning or content.

At the same time, the exercises in the first frame of reference provide an ideal opportunity for giving rise to the skillful feelings, mind states, and mental qualities that are implicitly favored in the lists provided for the last three frames of reference. We have already noted, in our discussion of the exercises under the first frame of reference, how specific exercises focused on the body also relate to the other frames of reference. For example, the practice of developing alertness to all the body's activities provides a foundation for developing right speech and right action, factors of the path listed under the fourth frame of reference. The same exercise strengthens concentrated states of mind, which are listed under the third. The contemplation of the elements helps to foster feelings not of the flesh, which are listed under the second.

These interrelationships connect directly to the third reason for viewing the act of establishing mindfulness on the body in and of itself as a foundation for the other three establishings of mindfulness: The practice of right concentration necessarily involves all four frames of reference. As we have seen, all the exercises and categories that DN 22 lists under the four frames relate explicitly or implicitly to the practice of concentration. Even the categories of feelings and mind states—which at first glance seem simply to encourage a passive registering of whatever arises—turn out, when viewed in the larger context of

the discourses, to be categories of events useful to keep in mind when bringing the mind to concentration. When you concentrate on the body, you have to deal with feelings, mind states, and mental qualities in a way that helps strengthen your focus, for they are all present right there. For concentration to be truly unified, all four frames have to work together. Otherwise, they pull your focus apart.

So, for these three reasons, it seems best to view the last three frames of reference as guides to fruitful ways of directing ardency when you focus on any of the exercises in the first.

2) As for the second point—that the sets of categories listed in DN 22 under the fourth frame of reference are useful primarily for subduing greed and distress with reference to the world—this point applies directly to four of the five sets: the five hindrances, the five clinging-aggregates, the sixfold sense media, and the four noble truths. The discussion under the hindrances explicitly deals with points to keep in mind when dealing with unskillful mental qualities, as does the discussion of the fetters associated with the sixfold sense media. The five clinging-aggregates, as we have seen, are a useful framework for undercutting passion. And as we have seen under the discussion of the four noble truths, DN 22 focuses special attention on the spots where craving arises in conjunction with the sixfold sense media, and where dispassion can be developed to abandon it.

In all these cases, these frameworks are useful for undercutting passion not only when the mind is surrounded with unskillful mental qualities that threaten to derail its concentration, but also when it has reached the stage where it's ready to go beyond attachment to its mastery of concentration so as to reach total release.

As for the seven factors for awakening, these deal more directly with qualities to develop around the focus of concentration, and less on qualities to subdue or abandon. However, two of its factors—the analysis of qualities, with its focus on the distinction between skillful and unskillful qualities; and persistence, in its effort to abandon unskillful qualities—are directly relevant to the process of subduing. And the list as a whole helps indirectly in subduing greed and distress in two ways: (1) The simple act of developing skillful qualities and finding joy in them, in and of itself, helps to induce dispassion for unskillful qualities. (2) As MN 118 points out, the seven factors for awakening, when combined with heightened concentration and heightened insight—dependent on seclusion, on dispassion, on cessation, resulting in letting go—lead to clear knowing and total release. This is the ultimate abandoning of any possible greed and distress.

This is why the discussion of all these frameworks in DN 22 seems to parallel the role of the fourth tetrad in breath meditation in subduing greed and distress with reference to the world.

3) As for the third point—that each of the four establishings of mindfulness can lead to the cultivation of the seven factors for awakening and, through them, to clear knowing and release: We have noted many times that all four establishings of mindfulness have to be used together in the development of right concentration. Still, individual meditators will find that the emphasis of their focus will shift from one frame of reference to another in this process, and may find one frame more fruitful than others. Their practice will thus be dominated

by that frame. But regardless of the frame, the pattern is always the same. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the "wheel" format of DN 22 makes the practical point that every exercise listed in the discourse can be developed through three levels: the establishing of mindfulness; the development of the establishing of mindfulness; and the equipoise of non-fashioning, where mindfulness is impersonal, independent of anything in the world. The first two levels entail the cultivation of right concentration based on right view, right effort, and right mindfulness, the same progression of factors found in the seven factors for awakening. The final stage of non-fashioning, independent of anything in the world, adds the elements of seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, resulting in letting go (MN 118) that enable the seven factors to lead to clear knowing and release.

This means that any of the frames of reference listed in DN 22 can be used to develop the seven factors for awakening and can lead, through them, all the way to the goal of ending suffering and stress.

So even though DN 22 doesn't explicitly describe the relations among the four frames of reference, or their relation to the seven factors for awakening, we can apply the framework provided by MN 118 to gain insight into how these qualities can be coordinated to provide a guide to ardency from the beginning to the end of the path to total unbinding.

CHAPTER TEN

Why

The Buddha begins and ends DN 22 by reminding his listeners of the reasons for practicing the establishings of mindfulness. In both his opening and closing statements, he describes this practice as a path going one way only to a desirable goal.

> **"This is a path going one way only *[ekāyana magga]* for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of unbinding—in other words, the four establishings of mindfulness."**

As a preface to his closing statements, the Buddha adds that this path is relatively short—depending, of course, on the ardency with which it is pursued.

> **"Now, if anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for seven years, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.**
>
> **"Let alone seven years. If anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for six years… five… four… three… two years… one year… seven months… six months… five… four… three… two months… one month… half a month, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.**
>
> **"Let alone half a month. If anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return."**

We noted in Chapter One that an important aspect of right view lies in understanding the right motivation for following the path, and that one of the duties of right mindfulness is to keep this right motivation in mind. So it's fitting that the Buddha would begin and end his discussion of *what* constitutes the practice of keeping a correct frame of reference in mind with a reminder of *why* the frame is correct: It helps take you directly to freedom.

The directness of the path is indicated not only by the speed with which it can potentially reach the goal, but also by the Pāli term *ekāyana magga.*

The term *ekāyana* can be read as a compound of *eka* (one) with either *ayana* (going; way) or *āyana* (producing; approaching; way). For many decades this term was mistranslated as "the only way," but more recently, translators—beginning with Ven. Ñāṇamoli—have noted that the phrase *ekāyana magga* appears in a series of similes in MN 12 where it reveals its idiomatic sense. In each of the similes, the Buddha describes his knowledge of the destination of an

individual on a particular path of practice. He sees that the way the individual conducts himself will lead inevitably to a particular destination. He then compares his knowledge to that of a person seeing an individual following an ekāyana magga to a particular destination and knowing that the individual will have to end up there for sure. For the similes to work, *ekāyana magga* requires the sense, not of an only way, but of a way that goes to only one destination. In other words, an ekāyana magga is a path that doesn't fork—one that, as long as you follow it, takes you to a single, inevitable goal.

Of the similes in MN 12, one deals with an ekāyana magga to unbinding—which, of course, would apply to the practice of right mindfulness:

> "Suppose that there were a lotus pond with pristine water, pleasing water, cool water, pellucid water; with restful banks, refreshing; and not far from it was a dense forest grove. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only *[ekāyana magga]* directed to that lotus pond. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that lotus pond.' Then at a later time he would see him—having plunged into the lotus pond, having bathed & drunk & relieved all his disturbance, exhaustion, & fever, and having come back out—sitting or lying down in the forest grove, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.
>
> "In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will, through the ending of the effluents, enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here-&-now.' Then at a later time I see him, through the ending of the effluents—having entered & remaining in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here-&-now—experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant." —*MN 12*

This is the sense in which the four establishings of mindfulness are a path going one way only.

Some people have asked why the Buddha would apply this epithet specifically to the four establishings of mindfulness when he doesn't use it to honor any other factor in the noble eightfold path? He doesn't even use it to describe the path as a whole. What's so special about right mindfulness?

One theory is that the Buddha wanted to distinguish right mindfulness from the forked paths of jhāna or the brahmavihāras, which can go either all the way to awakening or just to a pleasant rebirth. However, as we have seen, the Buddha made no sharp distinction between the establishing of mindfulness and the jhāna of right concentration. In fact, he described the two factors as intimately intertwined.

A more likely interpretation relates to the role the Buddha identified for right mindfulness as the supervisor of the path. Its ability to keep in mind the framework provided by right view—along with the duties appropriate to that framework and the motivation for following them—is what keeps the fabrications of the practice going in the right direction each step of the way. Together with right view and right effort, right mindfulness circles around each factor of the noble eightfold path, pointing them all straight to right concentration. It also circles around right concentration, reminding you of how and why to use it as a basis for developing the discernment leading to a happiness totally unfabricated and free. Even those who have fully attained that freedom find right mindfulness to be a pleasant abiding in the here-and-now.

That's why it's special.

APPENDIX ONE

MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA 118

The Ānāpānasati Sutta

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Sāvatthī in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra's mother, together with many well-known elder disciples—Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. MahāMoggallāna, Ven. MahāKassapa, Ven. MahāKaccāyana, Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita, Ven. MahāKappina, Ven. MahāCunda, Ven. Revata, Ven. Ānanda, and other well-known elder disciples. On that occasion the elder monks were teaching & instructing. Some elder monks were teaching & instructing ten monks, some were teaching & instructing twenty monks, some were teaching & instructing thirty monks, some were teaching & instructing forty monks. The new monks, being taught & instructed by the elder monks, were discerning grand, successive distinctions.

Now on that occasion—the uposatha day of the fifteenth, the full-moon night of the Pavāraṇā ceremony—the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks. Surveying the silent community of monks, he addressed them:

"Monks, I am content with this practice. I am content at heart with this practice. So arouse even more intense persistence for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of the as-yet-unrealized. I will remain right here at Sāvatthī (for another month) through the 'White Water-lily' Month, the fourth month of the rains."

The monks in the countryside heard, "The Blessed One, they say, will remain right there at Sāvatthī through the White Water-lily Month, the fourth month of the rains." So they left for Sāvatthī to see the Blessed One.

Then the elder monks taught & instructed the new monks even more intensely. Some elder monks were teaching & instructing ten monks, some were teaching & instructing twenty monks, some were teaching & instructing thirty monks, some were teaching & instructing forty monks. The new monks, being taught & instructed by the elder monks, were discerning grand, successive distinctions.

Now on that occasion—the uposatha day of the fifteenth, the full-moon night of the White Water-lily Month, the fourth month of the rains—the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks. Surveying the silent community of monks, he addressed them:

"Monks, this assembly is free from idle chatter, devoid of idle chatter, and is established on pure heartwood: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly to which a small gift, when given, becomes great, and a great gift greater: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that is rare to see in the world: such is this community of monks, such

is this assembly—the sort of assembly that it would be worth traveling for leagues, taking along provisions, in order to see.

"In this community of monks there are monks who are arahants, whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: Such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of the five lower fetters, are due to arise spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, destined never again to return from that world: Such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of (the first) three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners, who—on returning only once more to this world—will make an ending to stress: such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of (the first) three fetters, are stream-enterers, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening: Such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the development of the four establishings of mindfulness… the four right exertions… the four bases of power… the five faculties… the five strengths… the seven factors for awakening… the noble eightfold path: Such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the development of good will… compassion… empathetic joy… equanimity… (the perception of the) foulness (of the body)… the perception of inconstancy: Such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

"Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit. Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, brings the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination. The four establishings of mindfulness, when developed & pursued, bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination. The seven factors for awakening, when developed & pursued, bring clear knowing & release to their culmination.

A. MINDFULNESS OF IN-&-OUT BREATHING

"Now how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit?

"There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

"[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' [3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' [4] He trains

himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

"[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' [6] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' [7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' [8] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'

"[9] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' [10] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.' [11] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind.' [12] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'

"[13] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' [14] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion *[literally,* fading].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' [15] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' [16] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.'

"This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit.

B. THE FOUR ESTABLISHINGS OF MINDFULNESS

"And how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to bring the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination?

"[1] On whatever occasion a monk breathing in long discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, discerns, 'I am breathing out long'; or breathing in short, discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, discerns, 'I am breathing out short'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&… out sensitive to the entire body'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out calming bodily fabrication': On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—the in-&-out breath—is classed as a body among bodies, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[2] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to rapture'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to pleasure'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to mental fabrication'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out calming mental fabrication': On that occasion the monk remains focused on *feelings* in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—careful attention to in-&-out breaths—is classed as a feeling among feelings, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused

on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[3] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out gladdening the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out steadying the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out releasing the mind': On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *mind* in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I don't say that there is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing in one of lapsed mindfulness and no alertness, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[4] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on inconstancy'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on dispassion'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on cessation'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on relinquishment': On that occasion the monk remains focused on *mental qualities* in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed & distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to bring the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination.

C. THE SEVEN FACTORS FOR AWAKENING

"And how are the four establishings of mindfulness developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination?

"[1] On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady & without lapse. When his mindfulness is steady & without lapse, then *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[2] Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, & coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[3] In one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, persistence is aroused unflaggingly. When persistence is aroused unflaggingly in one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *persistence* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[4] In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not of the flesh arises. When a rapture not of the flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then

rapture as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[5] For one enraptured at heart, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body & mind of a monk enraptured at heart grow calm, then *calm* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[6] For one who is at ease—his body calmed—the mind becomes concentrated. When the mind of one who is at ease—his body calmed—becomes concentrated, then *concentration* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[7] He carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity. When he carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, *equanimity* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

[Similarly with the other three establishings of mindfulness: feelings, mind, & mental qualities.]

"This is how the four establishings of mindfulness are developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination.

D. CLEAR KNOWING & RELEASE

"And how are the seven factors for awakening developed & pursued so as to bring clear knowing & release to their culmination? There is the case where a monk develops *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening… *persistence* as a factor for awakening… *rapture* as a factor for awakening… *calm* as a factor for awakening… *concentration* as a factor for awakening… *equanimity* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment.

"This is how the seven factors for awakening are developed & pursued so as to bring clear knowing & release to their culmination."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

APPENDIX TWO

DIGHA NIKAYA 22

The Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying in the Kuru country. Now there is a town of the Kurus called Kammāsadhamma. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, "Monks."

"Lord," the monks responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: "This is a path going one way only to the purification of beings, to the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, to the disappearance of pain & distress, to the attainment of the right method, & to the realization of unbinding—in other words, the four establishings of mindfulness. Which four?

"There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

A. BODY

"And how does a monk remain focused on the body in & of itself?

"[1] There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

"Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body'; he trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication'; he trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.' Just as a dexterous lathe-turner or lathe-turner's apprentice, when making a long turn, discerns, 'I am making a long turn,' or when making a short turn discerns, 'I am making a short turn'; in the same way the monk, when breathing in long, discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' … He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication'; he trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not

clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"[2] And further, when walking, the monk discerns, 'I am walking.' When standing, he discerns, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he discerns, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he discerns, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"[3] And further, when going forward & returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward & looking away… when flexing & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe & his bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"[4] And further… just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain—wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice—and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, 'This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,' in the same way, the monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: 'In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not

clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"[5] And further… just as a dexterous butcher or butcher's apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, the monk reflects on this very body—however it stands, however it is disposed—in terms of properties: 'In this body there is the earth property, the water property, the fire property, & the wind property.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"[6] And further, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, & festering, he applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, being chewed by crows, being chewed by vultures, being chewed by hawks, being chewed by dogs, being chewed by hyenas, being chewed by various other creatures… a skeleton smeared with flesh & blood, connected with tendons… a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons… a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons… bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions—here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull… the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells… the bones piled up, more than a year old… the bones decomposed into a powder: He applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not

clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

B. FEELINGS

"And how does a monk remain focused on feelings in & of themselves? There is the case where a monk, when feeling a painful feeling, discerns, 'I am feeling a painful feeling.' When feeling a pleasant feeling, he discerns, 'I am feeling a pleasant feeling.' When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he discerns, 'I am feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.'

"When feeling a painful feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a painful feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh.' When feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh.' When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh.' When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, 'I am feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on feelings in & of themselves, or externally on feelings in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on feelings in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to feelings, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to feelings. Or his mindfulness that 'There are feelings' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on feelings in & of themselves.

C. MIND

"And how does a monk remain focused on the mind in & of itself? There is the case where a monk, when the mind has passion, discerns, 'The mind has passion.' When the mind is without passion, he discerns, 'The mind is without passion.' When the mind has aversion, he discerns, 'The mind has aversion.' When the mind is without aversion, he discerns, 'The mind is without aversion.' When the mind has delusion, he discerns, 'The mind has delusion.' When the mind is without delusion, he discerns, 'The mind is without delusion.'

"When the mind is constricted, he discerns, 'The mind is constricted.' When the mind is scattered, he discerns, 'The mind is scattered.' When the mind is enlarged, he discerns, 'The mind is enlarged.' When the mind is not enlarged, he discerns that the mind is not enlarged. When the mind is surpassed, he discerns, 'The mind is surpassed.' When the mind is unsurpassed, he discerns, 'The mind is unsurpassed.' When the mind is concentrated, he discerns, 'The mind is concentrated.' When the mind is not concentrated, he discerns, 'The mind is not concentrated.' When the mind is released, he discerns, 'The mind is released.' When the mind is not released, he discerns, 'The mind is not released.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the mind in & of itself, or externally on the mind in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the mind in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with

regard to the mind, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the mind, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the mind. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a mind' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the mind in & of itself.

D. MENTAL QUALITIES

"And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves?

"[1] There is the case where a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *five hindrances.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns, 'There is sensual desire present within me.' Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns, 'There is no sensual desire present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of sensual desire that has been abandoned. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining hindrances: ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.]

"In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances.

"[2] And further, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *five clinging-aggregates.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates? There is the case where a monk (discerns): 'Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling… Such is perception… Such are fabrications… Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates.

"[3] And further, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *sixfold internal & external sense media.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media? There is the case where he discerns the eye, he discerns forms, he discerns the fetter that arises dependent on both. He discerns how there is the arising of an unarisen fetter. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of a fetter once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of a fetter that has been abandoned. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining sense media: ear, nose, tongue, body, & intellect.]

"In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media.

"[4] And further, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *seven factors for awakening.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for awakening? There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a factor for awakening present within, he discerns, 'Mindfulness as a factor for awakening is present within me.' Or, there being no mindfulness as a factor for awakening present within, he discerns, 'Mindfulness as a factor for awakening is not present within me.' He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for awakening. And he discerns how there is the culmination of the development of mindfulness as a factor for awakening once it has arisen. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining factors for awakening: analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, & equanimity.]

"In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for awakening.

"[5] And further, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the *four noble truths.* And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths? There is the case where he discerns, as it has come to be, that 'This is

stress…This is the origination of stress…This is the cessation of stress…This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.'

"[a] Now what is the noble truth of stress? Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful; separation from the loved is stressful; not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And what is *birth?* Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, & acquisition of (sense) media of the various beings in this or that group of beings: This is called birth.

"And what is *aging?* Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings: This is called aging.

"And what is *death?* Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption of the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings: This is called death.

"And what is *sorrow?* Whatever sorrow, sorrowing, sadness, inward sorrow, inward sadness of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing: This is called sorrow.

"And what is *lamentation?* Whatever crying, grieving, lamenting, weeping, wailing, lamentation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing: This is called lamentation.

"And what is *pain?* Whatever is experienced as bodily pain, bodily discomfort, pain or discomfort born of bodily contact: This is called pain.

"And what is *distress?* Whatever is experienced as mental pain, mental discomfort, pain or discomfort born of mental contact: This is called distress.

"And what is *despair?* Whatever despair, despondency, desperation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing: This is called despair.

"And what is the stress of *association with the unbeloved?* There is the case where undesirable, unpleasing, unattractive sights, sounds, aromas, flavors, or tactile sensations occur to one; or one has connection, contact, relationship, interaction with those who wish one ill, who wish for one's harm, who wish for one's discomfort, who wish one no security from the yoke. This is called the stress of association with the unbeloved.

"And what is the stress of *separation from the loved?* There is the case where desirable, pleasing, attractive sights, sounds, aromas, flavors, or tactile sensations do not occur to one; or one has no connection, no contact, no relationship, no interaction with those who wish one well, who wish for one's benefit, who wish for one's comfort, who wish one security from the yoke, nor with one's mother, father, brother, sister, friends, companions, or relatives. This is called the stress of separation from the loved.

"And what is the stress of *not getting what is wanted?* In beings subject to birth, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to birth, and may birth not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wishing. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted. In beings subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, and

may aging… illness… death… sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wishing. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted.

"And what are the *five clinging-aggregates* that, in short, are stressful? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: These are called the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful.

"This is called the noble truth of stress.

"[b] And what is the noble truth of the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., sensuality-craving, becoming-craving, and non-becoming-craving.

"And where does this craving, when arising, arise? And where, when dwelling, does it dwell? Whatever is endearing & alluring in terms of the world: that is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

"And what is endearing & alluring in terms of the world? The eye is endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

"The ear.… The nose.… The tongue.… The body.… The intellect.…

"Forms.… Sounds.… Aromas.… Tastes.… Tactile sensations.… Ideas.…

"Eye-consciousness.… Ear-consciousness.… Nose-consciousness.… Tongue-consciousness.… Body-consciousness.… Intellect-consciousness.…

"Eye-contact.… Ear-contact.… Nose-contact.… Tongue-contact.… Body-contact.… Intellect-contact.…

"Feeling born of eye-contact.… Feeling born of ear-contact.… Feeling born of nose-contact.… Feeling born of tongue-contact.… Feeling born of body-contact.… Feeling born of intellect-contact.…

"Perception of forms.… Perception of sounds.… Perception of aromas.… Perception of tastes.… Perception of tactile sensations.… Perception of ideas.…

"Intention for forms.… Intention for sounds.… Intention for aromas.… Intention for tastes.… Intention for tactile sensations.… Intention for ideas.…

"Craving for forms.… Craving for sounds.… Craving for aromas.… Craving for tastes.… Craving for tactile sensations.… Craving for ideas.…

"Thought directed at forms.… Thought directed at sounds.… Thought directed at aromas.… Thought directed at tastes.… Thought directed at tactile sensations.… Thought directed at ideas.…

"Evaluation of forms.… Evaluation of sounds.… Evaluation of aromas.… Evaluation of tastes.… Evaluation of tactile sensations.… Evaluation of ideas is endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

"This is called the noble truth of the origination of stress.

"[c] And what is the noble truth of the cessation of stress? The remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"And where, when being abandoned, is this craving abandoned? And where, when ceasing, does it cease? Whatever is endearing & alluring in terms of the

world: that is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

"And what is endearing & alluring in terms of the world? The eye is endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

"The ear.… The nose.… The tongue.… The body.… The intellect.…

"Forms.… Sounds.… Aromas.… Tastes.… Tactile sensations.… Ideas.…

"Eye-consciousness.… Ear-consciousness.… Nose-consciousness.… Tongue-consciousness.… Body-consciousness.… Intellect-consciousness.…

"Eye-contact.… Ear-contact.… Nose-contact.… Tongue-contact.… Body-contact.… Intellect-contact.…

"Feeling born of eye-contact.… Feeling born of ear-contact.… Feeling born of nose-contact.… Feeling born of tongue-contact.… Feeling born of body-contact.… Feeling born of intellect-contact.…

"Perception of forms.… Perception of sounds.… Perception of aromas.… Perception of tastes.… Perception of tactile sensations.… Perception of ideas.…

"Intention for forms.… Intention for sounds.… Intention for aromas.… Intention for tastes.… Intention for tactile sensations.… Intention for ideas.…

"Craving for forms.… Craving for sounds.… Craving for aromas.… Craving for tastes.… Craving for tactile sensations.… Craving for ideas.…

"Thought directed at forms.… Thought directed at sounds.… Thought directed at aromas.… Thought directed at tastes.… Thought directed at tactile sensations.… Thought directed at ideas.…

"Evaluation of forms.… Evaluation of sounds.… Evaluation of aromas.… Evaluation of tastes.… Evaluation of tactile sensations.… Evaluation of ideas is endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

"This is called the noble truth of the cessation of stress.

"[d] And what is the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress? Just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"And what is right view? Knowledge in terms of stress, knowledge in terms of the origination of stress, knowledge in terms of the cessation of stress, knowledge in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.

"And what is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, resolve for non-ill will, resolve for harmlessness: This is called right resolve.

"And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech.

"And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, from stealing, & from sexual misconduct: This is called right action.

"And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This is called right livelihood.

"And what is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen… for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen… for the sake of the

arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen… (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This is called right effort.

"And what is right mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves… the mind in & of itself… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called right mindfulness.

"And what is right concentration? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called right concentration.

"This is called the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

"In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that 'There are mental qualities' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths.

E. CONCLUSION

"Now, if anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for seven years, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.

"Let alone seven years. If anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for six years… five… four… three… two years… one year… seven months… six months… five… four… three… two months… one month… half a month, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.

"Let alone half a month. If anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here-&-now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.

"'This is a path going one way only to the purification of beings, to the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, to the disappearance of pain & distress, to the attainment of the right method, & to the realization of unbinding—in other words, the four establishings of mindfulness.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

APPENDIX THREE

Jhāna & Right Concentration

Among the cardinal tenets of the modern interpretation of mindfulness are these: that mindfulness practice is radically different from jhāna practice, that jhāna is not necessary for awakening, and that the modicum of concentration attained through mindfulness-as-bare-awareness practices is enough to qualify as right concentration. However, these tenets fly in the face of the standard definition of the noble eightfold path, which defines right concentration as the four jhānas (SN 45:8; DN 22; MN 141). So to justify the modern view, many writers have argued that the Pali discourses contain passages indicating that right concentration doesn't necessarily mean jhāna, or that jhāna isn't always necessary for awakening. Because this is such an important point, it's worth examining these passages carefully, to see if they actually support the arguments based on them.

Before doing this, though, we should note that the texts record the Buddha as providing clear standards for how to evaluate statements made about his teachings. In DN 29 he presents a list of teachings to be taken as standard—the wings to awakening *(bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma)*—among which are the factors of the noble eightfold path, including right concentration. He goes on to say that if anyone claims to quote him on the topic of the Dhamma, that person's words should be measured against the standard. Anything that conflicts with the wings to awakening—either in expression or interpretation—should be recognized as wrong.

This means that if a passage in the discourses can be shown necessarily to conflict with these teachings, it must have been included in the discourses by mistake, for it's not in line with the Dhamma. So in this sense, the efforts to find passages deviating from the standard definition of right concentration are self-defeating. Any passage that proves the modern argument would, by the standards in DN 29, not count as Dhamma and so would not count as authoritative. It would have to be put aside.

However, when we examine the passages cited for the purpose of justifying the modern view, we find that they don't actually conflict with the standard definition of right concentration, and so don't need to be put aside. What needs to be put aside is the modern interpretation forced on them.

The arguments supporting the modern interpretation fall into three main sorts: those based on the defining characteristics of an awakened person, those based on alternative definitions of right concentration, and those based on redefining the word "right" in right concentration.

I.A. A discourse frequently cited by arguments of the first sort is SN 12:70, which concerns a group of monks who are arahants "released through discernment." Another monk, Ven. Susīma—who has ordained with the purpose of stealing the Dhamma from the monastic Saṅgha to take it to his sectarian friends so that they can claim it as their own—questions these arahants as to their attainments. Running down the list of the psychic powers that can sometimes result from jhāna practice, he asks them if they have attained any of

the powers, and they repeatedly reply, "No, friend." Then the conversation continues as follows:

> Ven. Susīma: "Then, having known thus, having seen thus, do you dwell touching with your body the peaceful emancipations, the formless states beyond form?"
>
> The monks: "No, friend."
>
> "So just now, friends, didn't you make that declaration [of arahantship] without having attained any of these Dhammas?"
>
> "We're released through discernment, friend Susīma." — *SN 12:70*

Some modern writers have cited this passage as proof that the arahants in question hadn't practiced the jhānas and yet had still gained awakening. This would imply that jhāna is not a necessary part of the path. However, the "peaceful liberations, the formless states beyond form" are not the four jhānas. Instead, they are the formless attainments that can be developed based on the equanimity developed in the fourth jhāna (see the quotation from MN 140 in Chapter One). The fact that the arahants in this discourse hadn't reached these attainments in no way proves that they reached arahantship without attaining the jhānas. In fact, the definition of "released through discernment" given in AN 9:43–45 states explicitly that arahants released through discernment can have attained any of the jhānas or formless attainments up through the cessation of perception and feeling, simply that they have not "touched with the body" any of the other subsidiary attainments—such as clairvoyance—that can open from those levels of concentration.

> Ven. Udāyin: "'Released through discernment, released through discernment,' it is said. To what extent is one described by the Blessed One as released through discernment?"
>
> Ven. Ānanda: "There is the case, my friend, where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. And he knows it through discernment. It's to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment, though with a sequel.
>
> "And further, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna… the third jhāna… the fourth jhāna… the dimension of the infinitude of space… the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness… the dimension of nothingness… the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. And he knows it through discernment. It's to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment, though with a sequel.
>
> "And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And as he sees with discernment, the effluents go to their total end. And he knows it through discernment. It's to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment without a sequel." — *AN 9:44*

So SN 12:70, particularly when read in the context of AN 9:43–45, doesn't support the argument that jhāna isn't necessary for awakening.

This fact has been pointed out several times by several authors. In response, a more recent version of the argument asserts that the compilers of SN 12:70 *wanted* to state that release through discernment doesn't involve the jhānas, but for some reason backed off from saying what they actually wanted to say. Of course, this argument takes the discussion away from the quest for Dhamma and into the realm of idle speculation. Even if we could divine the compilers' hidden agenda, and that agenda actually did deviate from the standard teaching on the necessity of jhāna, that would automatically disqualify the discourse from being taken as authoritative. So again, this new version of the argument is self-defeating as a guide to the Dhamma. However, it does raise one important Dhamma question that has to be taken seriously.

The question relates to the ensuing scene in SN 12:70. After questioning the arahants, Susīma goes to see the Buddha to report what he has heard. The Buddha validates the arahants' statements and then gives Susīma a standard questionnaire on the aggregates, and whether they are constant, pleasant, or deserve to be called "self." After Susīma gives the correct answers, the Buddha then quizzes him about whether he sees the connections among the factors of dependent co-arising, and Susīma answers that he does. This, in the standard idiom of the Canon, indicates that Susīma has attained at least stream entry, the first level of awakening, probably as a result of being exposed to the questionnaire on the aggregates. Now, the argument states, Susīma would have had no opportunity during this conversation to develop any of the jhānas. Thus the hidden purpose of including the conversation in the discourse was to show that awakening can occur without jhāna.

However, there is nothing in the definition of jhāna to indicate that it cannot be developed while listening to a Dhamma talk. As AN 10:71 points out, insight can lead to jhāna, and so it's possible that—if other conditions are right—the insight gained while listening to the Dhamma could induce a state of jhāna in the listener while the talk was occurring. In fact, the questionnaire on the aggregates that the Buddha uses with Susīma is one that he and his disciples used with great success in bringing about immediate awakening among their listeners, some of whom prior to hearing the questionnaire suffered from severe wrong view (MN 109, SN 22:59, SN 22:83, SN 22:85). As MN 111 and AN 9:36 show, the five aggregates are directly observable in the first jhāna, so a person in that level of concentration would be in an ideal position to observe the aggregates while being questioned on them.

Sometimes it's argued that a person in jhāna is "incapable of speech" or cannot hear sounds, but neither of these assertions is supported by the Canon. SN 36:11 does state that speech grows still when one is in the first jhāna, but this doesn't mean that a person in the first jhāna is incapable of speech, just as the stilling of in-and-out breathing in the fourth jhāna doesn't mean that one is incapable of breathing. The stilling of speech in the first jhāna simply means that, for the duration of the time one is speaking, the level of stillness in one's mind would not count as the first jhāna. In other words, a person in the first jhāna would be leaving the first jhāna when starting to speak, but could immediately return to the first jhāna as soon as he/she stops speaking.

As for the assertion that a person in jhāna cannot hear sounds, this point is clearly disproven by an incident in the Vinita-vatthu, or Precedents, listed in the discussion of Pārājika 4 in the Vinaya. There, Ven. Moggallāna states that he can hear sounds when entering the formless attainments. A group of monks object to his statement, convinced that he is making a false claim—which would be a violation of the rule—so they report his statement to the Buddha. The Buddha's reply: Moggallāna's experience of those attainments was not pure; however, that impurity was not enough to make the statement false. He actually was experiencing the formless attainments.

Now, given that Moggallāna was an arahant at the time of this incident, then even though his attainment of the formless attainments was not completely pure, it was pure enough. And although this passage doesn't specify whether the ability to hear sounds in any of the four jhānas would make those jhānas impure, it clearly implies that the ability to hear sounds while in the first jhāna would not disqualify it from being jhāna.

So the fact that Ven. Susīma could attain the first level of awakening while listening to the Dhamma is no proof that he did not enter at least the first jhāna while listening to the Buddha's questionnaire. And so it's hard to find any trace of hidden motive in the presentation of SN 12:70. The discourse does not explicitly or implicitly support the idea that jhāna is unnecessary for awakening.

I.B. Another passage cited to prove that one can be an arahant without having attained jhāna is in AN 4:87. Here, the Buddha lists four types of contemplatives, two of them being the "white-lotus contemplative" and the "red-lotus contemplative."

> "And which individual is the white-lotus contemplative? There is the case, monks, where a monk—through the ending of the effluents—has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, directly knowing & realizing them for himself right in the here-&-now. But he does not also remain touching with his body the eight emancipations *[vimokkha].* This is how an individual is a white-lotus contemplative.
>
> "And which individual is the red-lotus contemplative? There is the case, monks, where a monk—through the ending of the effluents—has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, directly knowing & realizing them for himself right in the here-&-now. And he remains touching with his body the eight emancipations. This is how an individual is a red-lotus contemplative." —*AN 4:87*

The argument here is that the eight emancipations, while not identical to the four jhānas and the formless attainments, are nevertheless equivalent to them. This would mean that "white-lotus" arahants are those who have attained none of the jhānas, whereas "red-lotus" arahants are those who have mastered all the jhānas.

Now it is true that the last five of the eight emancipations are identical with the four formless attainments plus the cessation of perception and feeling. From this it could be argued that the first three emancipations are simply another name for the four jhānas, in which case the "white-lotus" arahants would have to be devoid of jhāna. But there are two reasons for not accepting this argument.

The first reason comes from the description of the three emancipations themselves:

> "Possessed of form, one sees forms. This is the first emancipation.
>
> "Not percipient of form internally, one sees forms externally. This is the second emancipation.
>
> "One is intent only on the beautiful. This is the third emancipation." —*DN 15*

These are not descriptions of the four jhānas, for they contain no mention of the jhāna factors. Their emphasis is on what one *sees,* which means that they are types of meditative visionary experiences. The mere fact that they can lead to the formless attainments does not make them equivalent to the jhānas. They simply provide an alternative route to the formless attainments. In fact, the existence of this alternative route may explain why the Buddha, prior to his awakening, was able to reach the formless attainments when studying under Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, without at the same time passing through the four jhānas. So to say that an arahant doesn't touch these emancipations with his/her body doesn't mean that he/she has not attained any of the four jhānas.

The second reason for not accepting the argument that an arahant who has not mastered the eight emancipations must be devoid of jhāna is a parallel passage in DN 15, which describes two types of arahants. One is the arahant released both ways, whose definition is identical with that of the "red-lotus" contemplative. The second type, who does not touch the eight emancipations, is called the arahant "released through discernment." This would correspond to the "white-lotus" contemplative. But look at what this arahant knows:

> "There are beings with diversity of body and diversity of perception, such as human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is the first station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings with diversity of body and singularity of perception, such as the devas of the Brahmā hosts generated by the first [jhāna] and [some] beings in the four realms of deprivation. This is the second station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings with singularity of body and diversity of perception, such as the Radiant Devas. This is the third station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings with singularity of body and singularity of perception, such as the Beautifully Lustrous Devas. This is the fourth station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings who, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) 'infinite space,' arrive at the dimension of the infinitude of space. This is the fifth station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'infinite consciousness,' arrive at

> the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This is the sixth station of consciousness.
>
> "There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' arrive at the dimension of nothingness. This is the seventh station of consciousness.
>
> "The dimension of non-percipient beings and, second, the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. [These are the two dimensions.]
>
> "Now, as for the first station of consciousness—beings with diversity of body and diversity of perception, such as human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms: If one discerns that (station of consciousness), discerns its origination, discerns its disappearance, discerns its allure, discerns its drawbacks, discerns the escape from it, would it be proper, by means of that (discernment) to take delight there?"
>
> "No, lord."
>
> [Similarly with each of the remaining stations of consciousness and two dimensions.]
>
> "Ānanda, when knowing, as they have come to be, the origination, disappearance, allure, drawbacks of—and escape from—these seven stations of consciousness and two dimensions, a monk is released through lack of clinging, he is said to be a monk released through discernment." — *DN 15*

According to AN 4:123, the third station of consciousness is attained through the second jhāna; the fourth station of consciousness, through the third. So to have knowledge of these stations would require at least a modicum of jhāna. For this reason, we cannot accept the idea that a "white-lotus" contemplative has to be an arahant without jhāna.

I.C. A subset of the first set of arguments against the necessity of jhāna on the path contains arguments affirming that jhāna is necessary for arahantship, but denying that it's necessary for stream entry, the first level of awakening. The prime example of this type of argument is based on a passage in AN 3:87, which describes a stream-enterer as one who is "wholly accomplished in virtue, moderately accomplished in concentration, and moderately accomplished in discernment." Only with non-return, the discourse states, does one become "wholly accomplished in concentration." In support of the idea that this means that the stream-enterer has not attained jhāna, the argument points to many of the lists in the discourses describing the virtues and accomplishments of the stream-enterer, none of which state that he/she is accomplished in jhāna (see, for instance, SN 55:32; SN 55:33; and AN 10:92).

However, this argument ignores two passages in the Canon stating clearly that right concentration is a part of the path to stream entry: MN 117 and SN 55:5. In fact, MN 117 places jhāna at the heart of the stream-enterer's path. The statement that concentration is mastered only on the level of non-return must be interpreted in light of the distinction between mastery and attainment. A stream-enterer may have attained jhāna without mastering it, just as he/she has gained some discernment into dependent co-arising (AN 10:92) without fully mastering

that topic. The discernment developed in the process of gaining full mastery over the practice of jhāna will then lead him/her to the level of non-return.

So none of the passages cited to prove that jhāna is not a necessary part of an awakened person's attainments actually support the arguments based on them.

As for the second set of arguments, which try to prove that the Canon contains alternative definitions of right concentration that don't involve jhāna, three of the passages cited by these arguments are worthy of note:

II.A. The first is a definition of right concentration that appears in DN 18 and MN 117. In those discourses, noble right concentration is defined as "any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness." This, the argument goes, shows that there is another form of concentration aside from jhāna that would qualify as right concentration, inasmuch as the jhāna factors are not mentioned in the definition.

This argument, however, misses two points. The first is that this definition differs in no way from the opening part of the definition of the first jhāna: "There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna." The "unskillful qualities" in this passage are identified by SN 45:22 as "wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, wrong concentration." And of course, sensuality is renounced through right resolve. In fact, MN 78 indicates a direct connection between right resolve and jhāna, stating that the first jhāna is where all unskillful resolves cease without trace. This means that any concentration truly endowed with right resolve would have to be at least the first jhāna.

The second point is that MN 117 itself confirms the connection between right resolve and jhāna, in that it defines noble right resolve as: "the thinking, directed thinking, resolve, mental fixity, mental transfixion, focused awareness, & verbal fabrications [directed thought and evaluation] in one developing the noble path." The reference in this passage to factors of the first jhāna means that noble right resolve is itself part of the first jhāna.

So there is nothing in the definition of right concentration offered in DN 18 and MN 117 to indicate that it would be anything other than jhāna.

II.B. Another passage said to offer an alternative definition of right concentration not involving jhāna appears in MN 149. There a meditator is described as knowing and seeing the processes of the six senses as they have come to be, after which:

> "For him—uninfatuated, unattached, unconfused, remaining focused on their drawbacks—the five clinging-aggregates head toward future diminution. The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—is abandoned by him. His bodily disturbances & mental disturbances are abandoned. His bodily torments & mental torments are abandoned. His bodily distresses & mental distresses are abandoned. He is sensitive both to ease of body & ease of awareness.
>
> "Any view belonging to one who has come to be like this is his right view. Any resolve, his right resolve. Any effort, his right effort. Any

> mindfulness, his right mindfulness. Any concentration, his right concentration: just as earlier his actions, speech, & livelihood were already well-purified. Thus for him, having thus developed the noble eightfold path, the four establishings of mindfulness go to the culmination of their development. The four right exertions… the four bases of power… the five faculties… the five strengths… the seven factors for awakening go to the culmination of their development. [And] for him these two qualities occur in tandem: calm & insight." —*MN 149*

Some writers have maintained that this passage constitutes an alternative definition of right concentration, based on a pure insight practice into the nature of the six senses, with no mention of jhāna. However, the passage itself says that it's an instance of insight developed in tandem with calm. Now, the Buddha often told the monks, "Develop concentration, monks. A concentrated monk discerns things as they have come to be" (SN 22:5; SN 35:96; SN 56:1). In fact, in SN 35:96, the "things" to be discerned as they have come to be are the processes of the six senses.

> "Develop concentration, monks. A concentrated monk discerns things as they have come to be. And what does he discern as it has come to be? He discerns as it has come to be that 'the eye is inconstant.' He discerns as it has come to be that 'forms are inconstant.' He discerns as it has come to be that 'eye-consciousness is inconstant.' He discerns as it has come to be that 'contact at the eye is inconstant.' He discerns as it has come to be that, 'Whatever arises in dependence on this contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—that too is inconstant.' [Similarly with the remaining senses.]" —*SN 35:96*

This indicates that the practice described in MN 149 would best be *based on* the practice of right concentration, so that the mind would be in an ideal position to see things actually as they have come to be. So there is nothing here to indicate that it would be a "pure insight" practice, or that the concentration on which it is based would be anything but jhāna.

II.C. A third passage sometimes cited to prove that a form of meditation different from the four jhānas would qualify as right concentration appears in AN 4:163. This discourse describes four types of practice: painful practice with slow intuition, painful practice with quick intuition, pleasant practice with slow intuition, and pleasant practice with quick intuition. In making the distinction between painful and pleasant practice, it defines painful practice in these terms:

> "There is the case where a monk remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to the body. Percipient of loathsomeness with regard to food & non-delight with regard to the entire world, he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to all fabrications. The perception of death is well-established within him." —*AN 4:163*

In contrast, pleasant practice is described with the standard formula for the four jhānas. Some writers have taken this as proof that there is an alternative

path to awakening that does not involve the jhānas, in that the description of painful practice contains no reference to the jhānas at all.

This reading, however, misses the way in which AN 4:163 describes how painful practice and pleasant practice can yield either slow or quick intuition. Here's how it explains why either form of practice might yield slow intuition:

> "One dwells in dependence on these five strengths of a learner—strength of conviction, strength of shame, strength of compunction, strength of persistence, & strength of discernment—but one's five faculties—the faculty of conviction… persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment—appear weakly. Because of their weakness, one attains only slowly the immediacy [the concentration of unmediated knowing—see Sn 2:1] that leads to the ending of the effluents." —*AN 4:163*

Practice yielding quick intuition differs in that the five faculties appear intensely. Now, in both cases, the faculty of concentration—which is defined with the standard formula for the jhānas (SN 48:10)—has to be present for the ending of the effluents. Because this is true both for painful practice and for pleasant practice, both sorts of practice, whether slow or quick, need jhāna in order to succeed.

So none of the passages cited to prove that the Canon recognizes forms of right concentration that do not include jhāna actually support the arguments based on them.

III. As for the third set of arguments, which offer a different definition for the word "right" *(sammā)* in right concentration: These try to make the point that "right" has to be understood in such a way that alternative types of concentration would not necessarily be wrong. One example can serve to illustrate the entire set.

The PTS Dictionary states that *sammā* is related to two Sanskrit words: *samyak,* which means "right"; and *samīś,* which can mean "connected; in one." Based on this etymology, it has been argued as follows: "[T]he qualification *sammā,* 'right'… literally means 'togetherness', or 'to be connected in one'. Thus to speak of the four absorptions or of unification of the mind as 'right' concentration does not simply mean that these are 'right' and all else is 'wrong', but points to the need to incorporate the development of concentration into the noble eightfold path."

This argument, however, neglects two glaring points. The first is that etymology is an unreliable guide to what a word means in context. English contains plenty of examples where a word's etymology would be a misleading guide to its meaning—think of "conscience" and "terrific"—and Pāli contains many more. To understand what *sammā* means in Pāli, we have to look at how it's actually used in the texts. And we find that when *sammā* is used to describe the factors of the path, its opposite is never "apart" or "not included" or "not connected." Its opposite is always *micchā,* which unequivocally means, "wrong" (MN 117; MN 126; AN 10:108).

The second point is that if this argument were to be valid for right concentration, it would also have to be valid for every other factor of the path. To speak of "right view" would not be a matter of saying that one view was

right or another wrong; it would simply point to the need to incorporate views of some sort on the path; "right action" would indicate the need to incorporate actions of some sort on the path—and so on for the other factors. In this way, the path would become meaningless, for any type of view, resolve, etc., would qualify as the path.

So there is no reason for anyone who looks to the Pāli Canon for guidance to regard arguments of this third sort as convincing or helpful.

Four discourses attributed to the Buddha (AN 7:29–32) list the activities and mental attributes that a monk should respect if he is not to fall away from the practice. The lists in the four discourses differ in some of their details, but all four include the need to have respect for concentration. This is in addition to another member in each list—respect for training—which by implication also includes concentration, in that concentration is one of the three trainings (AN 3:85). In this way, these discourses highlight respect for concentration as deserving special attention. Perhaps the Buddha foresaw that, with jhāna being the most difficult part of the path, it would be the most likely to be discredited with the passage of time. It's a shame that so many teachers and practitioners in the modern world have fallen into this trap in their enthusiasm to promote their own views on mindfulness and insight. Anyone serious about reaping the full benefits of the practice would be well advised to remember that the Buddha saw right mindfulness, insight, tranquility, and jhāna as mutually reinforcing. Respect for all of these qualities is a necessary attitude in following the path to the end of suffering and stress.

> "If a monk would wish, 'May I—with the ending of effluents—remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for myself right in the here-&-now,' then he should be one who brings the precepts to perfection, who is committed to inner tranquility of awareness, who does not neglect jhāna, who is endowed with insight, and who frequents empty dwellings." —*AN 10:71*

Glossary

Abhidhamma: The third division of the Pāli Canon, composed of texts that elaborate on lists of terms and categories drawn from the discourses.

Āmisa: Literally, "flesh"; "bait"; "lure." Used to describe objects of sensual enjoyment and the feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain that arise in the quest for sensual enjoyment. Its opposite is *nirāmisa*—not of the flesh—which describes the feelings developed around jhāna and the pursuit of release from suffering and stress.

Arahant: A "worthy one" or "pure one." A person whose mind is free of defilement and thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

Āsava: Effluent; fermentation. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that "flow out" of the mind and create the flood *(ogha)* of the round of death & rebirth.

Brahmā: A deva inhabiting the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahman: A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, "brahman" can also mean an arahant, conveying the point that excellence is based not on birth or race, but on the qualities attained in the mind.

Brahmavihāra: Literally, "brahmā-dwelling." Attitudes of unlimited good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.

Deva (devatā): Literally, "shining one." A being on the subtle levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, living either in terrestrial or heavenly realms.

Dhamma: (1) Event, action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbāna (although there are passages describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma.*

Gandhabba: A member of the lowest level of celestial devas.

Gotama: The Buddha's clan name.

Iddhipāda: Base of success, base of (meditative) power. One of the sets of Dhammas the Buddha included in the list of his most basic teachings. There are four in all, and the standard formula describing them is this: "There is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *desire* & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on *persistence*… concentration founded on *intent*… concentration founded on *discrimination* & the fabrications of exertion." *(SN 51:15)*

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion.

Kamma: (1) Intentional action; (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma.*

Kasiṇa: Totality. A meditative practice in which one stares at an object with the purpose of fixing a one-pointed image of it in one's consciousness and then manipulating the image to make it fill the totality of one's awareness.

Khandha: Aggregate; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced; the raw material for a sense of self: *rūpa*—physical form; *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; *saññā*—perception, mental label; *saṅkhāra*—fabrication, thought construct; and *viññāṇa*—sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha.*

Māra: The personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from the round of death and rebirth.

Nibbāna: Literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa.*

Nimitta: Theme; sign. According to MN 44, the four establishings of mindfulness are the themes of right concentration.

Pāli: The language of the oldest extant Canon of the Buddha's teachings.

Pavāraṇā: Invitation. A monastic ceremony marking the end of the rains retreat on the full moon in October. During the ceremony, each monk invites his fellow monks to accuse him of any offenses they may have suspected him of having committed. As happens in MN 118, this ceremony can be delayed for up to one lunar month.

Saṁvega: Dismay over the pointlessness of the sufferings of life as ordinarily lived.

Saṅgha: On the conventional *(sammāti)* level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns; on the ideal *(ariya)* level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream entry.

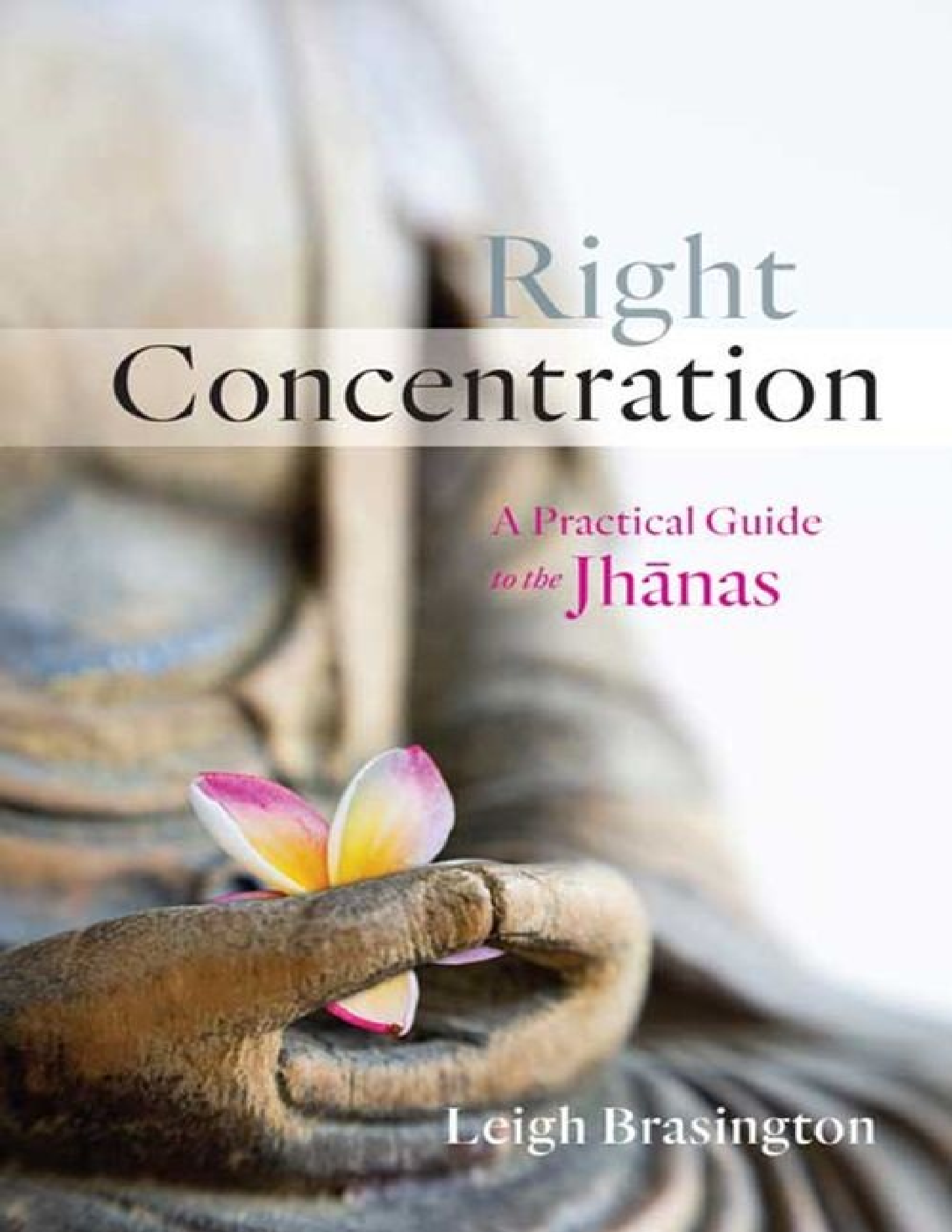
Sutta: Discourse. Sanskrit form: *Sūtra.*

Tathāgata: Literally, one who has "become authentic *(tatha-āgata)"* or who is "truly gone *(tathā-gata)."* An epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

Upādāna: The act of clinging to something to take sustenance from it. The activities that, when clung to, constitute suffering are the five *khandhas.* The clinging itself takes four forms: to sensuality, to habits & practices, to views, and to theories about the self.

Uposatha: Observance day, coinciding with the full moon, new moon, and half moons. Lay Buddhists often observe the eight precepts on this day. Monks recite the Pāṭimokkha, the monastic code, on the full moon and new moon uposathas.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text.


Right
Concentration
A Practical Guide
to the Jhānas
Leigh Brasington

“For those interested in exploring jhāna, Leigh brings many years of skillful teaching to this accessible, clear, and helpful guide.”

—Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path with Heart*

“Leigh Brasington presents a clear map of jhāna practice as he learned it from his teacher, Ayya Khema. As with many aspects of the Buddha’s teachings, different traditions and lineages have different views on what constitutes these deeper states of concentration. Leigh offers many examples from his own experience and from his reading of the Buddhist texts in providing a valuable guide to this particular way of understanding and practicing them.”

—Joseph Goldstein, author of *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*

ABOUT THE BOOK

The jhānas are eight progressive altered states of consciousness that can be identified with the aspect of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path called Right Concentration. Training in concentration leads to these states, each of which yields a deeper and subtler state of awareness than the previous one. The jhānas are not in themselves awakening, but they are a skillful means for stilling the mind in a way that leads in that direction, and they are attainable by anyone who devotes the time and sincerity of practice necessary to realize them. Leigh Brasington’s guide to navigating the jhāna path is deeply informed by the view of them transmitted to him by his teacher, Ven. Ayya Khema, a view based on the Pali suttas.

LEIGH BRASINGTON studied the jhānas with the late Ven. Ayya Khema, who authorized him to teach retreats on the jhānas. He was also empowered to teach by Jack Kornfield. He teaches numerous jhāna retreats throughout the year, at venues that include Cloud Mountain, Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, Gaia House, Vallecitos, and Southern Dharma. This is his first book.

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Right CONCENTRATION

A Practical Guide to the Jhānas

Leigh Brasington

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For my (so-called) students,
in deep appreciation for all they have taught me

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Publisher's Note

This book contains diacritics and special characters. If you encounter difficulty displaying these characters, please set your e-reader device to publisher defaults (if available) or to an alternate font.

Abbreviations Used in Textual References

AN Anguttara-Nikāya (book.verse)

Dhp *Dhammapada* (verse)

Dhs *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*

D Dīgha Nikāya (PTS page references)

DN Dīgha Nikāya (sutta.verse or sutta.subsection.verse.item)

Iti Itivuttaka (verse)

MN Majjhima Nikāya (sutta.verse)

PED *Pali-English Dictionary* from the Pali Text Society

SN Saṃyutta Nikāya (sutta.verse)

Snp Sutta-nipāta (book.sutta)

Ud Udāna (book.sutta)

Vsm *Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification* by

Buddhaghosa, translated by the Ven. Ñāṇamoli, BPS 1956, 2010)

Preface

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA.
Homage to the Blessed One, the Arahat, the Perfectly Awakened Buddha.

THE JHĀNAS are eight altered states of consciousness, brought on via concentration, and each yielding a deeper state of concentration than the previous. In teaching the eightfold path, the Buddha defined right concentration to be the jhānas. The jhānas themselves are not awakening, but they are a skillful means for concentrating the mind in a way that leads in that direction, and they are attainable not only by monastics, but also by many serious lay practitioners.

This book is an attempt to transmit what I have learned about the jhānas into a readable form. Since the jhānas don't lend themselves to "book learning," this attempt is bound to be less than ideal. Nonetheless, I hope to provide at least some useful information about the jhānas and how they can be used on the spiritual path.

This book assumes some familiarity with both meditation and basic Buddhist teachings.[a] The jhānas are definitely an advanced topic. In general, learning the jhānas comes much more easily for those who have attended at least two one-week or longer silent meditation retreats and have a good daily meditation practice of at least forty-five minutes, preferably longer. So I've written this book for people who have the requisite background for beginning to learn the jhānas. However, if you are primarily interested in learning about the jhānas rather than learning them as a practice, this book should also serve you well.

I have used a number of Pali words, so there is a glossary at the back of this book. It turns out to be easier to be precise by using the words from the suttas than an English word that doesn't really capture the essence of what the Buddha was teaching. The following table should be helpful:

sutta discourse, teaching

mettā loving-kindness, unconditional love
samādhi indistractability, concentration, pulling/gathering together
vitakka thinking
vicāra examining
pīti glee, rapture
sukha happiness/joy
dukkha bummer,[b] unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering, distress

That last word, *dukkha*, is extremely important. The Buddha said on several occasions that he taught "dukkha and especially the end of dukkha."[1] This book will hopefully show how jhāna practice is very helpful in the quest to gain the deep insights necessary for ending dukkha.

The translations in this book are based on the works of Bhikkhu Bodhi, Maurice Walshe, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu. I have at times altered these translations, occasionally to make something clearer and often to remove the gender specific *he/his*, for which I have substituted *one/one's*—the Pali is simply third person singular and literally could be *he, she*, or *one*. Since this book is written for a general audience, not a male monastic one, and given the centuries of misogynist patriarchy in Buddhism, I am unwilling to write in a way that gives any credence to that particular misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings. I have also used *they* and *their* as singular gender-neutral pronouns when necessary in order to avoid silliness like *s/he* or *he/she*.

This book is based on the jhāna teachings found in the suttas of the Pali canon. Although at times I use phrases like "the Buddha says" and "the Buddha taught," from a strict scholastic viewpoint, I should be saying something like "suttas say the Buddha says" and "suttas say the Buddha taught." But that seems overly pedantic; I trust you will know that when I say "the Buddha says," I'm just indicating what the suttas record the Buddha as saying.

The jhānas are a controversial topic, and I would not be surprised if what I have written here adds to the controversy. This is not my intent; I only want to share what I have learned so that these wonderfully powerful states can be used successfully by more people on their path toward awakening. One of the most important things to bring on the spiritual path is an open mind. If you are not fully awake right now, you are going to have to change your mind to get there. It is very helpful to remember the line of teaching on views given in the closing verse of the Mettā Sutta (Snp 1.8):

But when one lives quite free from any view,

is virtuous, with perfect insight won,
and greed for sensual desires expelled—
one surely comes no more to any womb.[2]

May what follows be useful to you on your spiritual journey.

You can find all the web links mentioned in this book at http://rc.leighb.com/links.htm. Bookmark this site and you won't have to type any long, complex web addresses.

—Leigh Brasington

a For an excellent introduction to basic Buddhist teachings, please see the book *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere* by Ayya Khema (Wisdom Publications, 1988).
b See the essay "*Dukkha* Is a Bummer" at http://leighb.com/bummer.htm for a detailed exploration of why "bummer" is a good translation of *dukkha*.

Introduction

JUNE 4, 1988: It's forty minutes into the forty-five-minute sitting before lunch—and my back is killing me. I slide forward on the little cushion I'm using as a zafu and my sit bones slip onto the mat, but my tailbone remains on the cushion. The result is instantaneous. My hips are thrust forward, correctly aligning my vertebrae and thus relaxing all the muscle tension in my back, and a huge flood of joyous energy fills my whole being. Immediately two thoughts arise: "I'm gonna always sit like this!" and "This must be what that Dutch woman was talking about when she asked that question 'What do I do with all this joy I'm getting?'"

I was at Ajahn Buddhadasa's Wat Suan Mokkh[a] in southern Thailand, and they told me there that what I was experiencing was called *pīti*. I didn't really understand what was happening—I just knew I liked it and that my motivation for sitting in meditation had changed from doing it because I knew it was good for me, to meditating because I wanted to. I continued to access the pīti once or twice a day for the rest of my stay at Suan Mokkh, but my access dropped away when my daily meditation practice became more irregular as I continued my Asian travels that year.

Over the course of the next two years, I found I had fairly regular access to the pīti depending on how regular my sitting practice was. I mentioned it to teachers with whom I had interviews on subsequent retreats, but no one really seemed able to give me any advice about what to do next. I remember saying, "It's like I've found the door to the magic castle. I go into the first room and wander around for about ten minutes and then find myself back outside again. I know there's got to be more rooms!"

In May of 1990, I attended a ten-day retreat with Venerable Ayya Khema, who had led the very first retreat I ever attended back in 1985. I remembered she had been a very excellent teacher on that first retreat. So when a friend thrust a flyer into my hands for the 1990 retreat with her, I signed up. I went to my first interview with her, and, after exchanging pleasant courtesies, she said, "Well now, tell me about your meditation."

“I can get to pīti,” I replied.

“Good. That’s the first jhāna; here’s how you do the second.” Somebody knew what was happening and furthermore knew what came next! By the end of that retreat, I had access to not only the first and second jhānas, but also the third, fourth, and fifth. And I knew I’d found my teacher.

A year later I sat with Ayya for five weeks. I learned jhānas six, seven, and eight and was thoroughly enjoying running ’em up (one to eight) and running ’em back down (eight to one). Not too long after I gained some skill at doing this, I was again in an interview with Ayya, and she said, “Now you must do insight practice in the same sitting after you do the jhānas.”

“But it takes me the whole sitting to go up and back down,” I protested.

“Do them faster.”

Now, Ayya Khema was not someone you wanted to argue with, so I nodded, said, “Yes, ma’am,” and went back to meditating and “doing them faster.” That indeed left time for insight practice. And wow! The flood of insights was mind-blowing. The quantity and quality was unlike anything I’d ever experienced before. My fascination with altered states was gone and replaced with a drive to see what I could learn next. By the end of that retreat, I felt for the first time that I had some idea of the basics of what the Buddha taught. I could hang all those lists that had been abstractly floating around, on the pegs *of sīla, samādhi*, and *paññ̃a:* ethical behavior, concentration, and wisdom. But even more important: the insights were life changing; when I got home, my friends could see a difference. My dedication to following the path the Buddha had laid out was now unshakable—and I knew how to proceed.

The Jhānas. Perhaps no aspect of the Buddha’s teaching has been both more misunderstood and neglected than right concentration. Yet right concentration is obviously an integral part of the Buddha’s path to awakening:[b] right concentration is the eighth item of the noble[c] eight-fold path and is often exemplified by and even defined as the four jhānas.[1] Before his awakening, after rejecting both the path of sensual indulgence and the path of austerities, the Buddha remembered an incident from his childhood when he had experienced the first jhāna; upon further reflection he concluded, “That is indeed the path to awakening.”[2]

This book is an attempt to rectify the misunderstandings and neglect of the role of concentration in the Buddha’s teachings. Part One will provide a practical guide to the jhānas using the material found in the suttas of the Pali canon, supplemented with my practice of these states and my teaching them to over a thousand students during the course of over a hundred meditation retreats. Since

the material presented in Part One will be different in some ways from what is traditionally presented when the jhānas are (occasionally) taught, Part Two will take a much closer, in-depth look at the jhānas as presented in the suttas to tease out exactly what is being said there.

The *word jhāna* literally means "meditation."[d] It comes from the *verb jhāyati*, which means "to meditate." Many times the Buddha would give a dhamma talk and close it by saying, "There are these roots of trees, these empty huts, go meditate (*Jhāyati*)."[3] From this usage of *jhāyati*, it seems certain that what the Buddha meant by meditation was jhāna practice.

In the suttas, there are four jhānas and four immaterial states. These eight states are at times presented as a sequence of eight progressively deeper concentration experiences, each one building on the concentration generated by the previous experience. More often they are presented as the four jhānas without any mention of the four immaterial states, and at other times the four immaterial states are presented without any mention of the four jhānas. In modern times (and even as early as the Abhidhamma composition period) these eight states are simply called the *eight jhānas*.

As I discovered back in 1991, the Buddha's teachings can be divided into three parts: sīla, samādhi, and paññā: ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. Or to put it into the vernacular: clean up your act, concentrate your mind, and use your concentrated mind to investigate reality. The practices the Buddha taught fit neatly into one of the three categories. The precepts[e] and the brahma-vihāra practices of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity are ethical practices. The brahma-vihāra practices, especially loving-kindness (mettā) practice, can also generate concentration, as do mantra and visualization practices. But most everything else you think of when you hear the word *meditation* are wisdom practices—practices that are intended to help you "see the way things are" (or perhaps more accurately "what's actually happening"). But the Buddha makes it abundantly clear[4] that your examination of reality should be done with a concentrated mind. And the jhānas are the method he taught over and over again for concentrating the mind.

The Pali word *samādhi* is usually translated as "concentration," and that's not a bad translation. But "concentration" has a furrowed-brow connotation. Perhaps a better translation would be "indistractability," which unfortunately is not really an English word. What the Buddha is pointing to with the word *samādhi* is the ability of your mind to not become distracted—the ability of your mind to remain aware of a specific, chosen topic without unintentionally wandering off to some other topic. Although I will use the word "concentration" as a translation of *samādhi* throughout this book, you should strive to keep in mind

that it really is referring to a state of indistractability.

Concentration is called both a power and a faculty. In both cases it is defined as the four jhānas,[5] just like right concentration is also defined as the four jhānas.[6] The jhānas are eight altered states of consciousness, brought on via concentration and each yielding more concentration than the previous. This way, as you pass through the jhānas, you stairstep your way to deeper and deeper levels of concentration—that is, you are becoming less and less likely to become distracted. Upon emerging from the jhānas—preferably the fourth or higher[f]—you begin doing an insight practice with your jhānically concentrated, indistractable mind.[g] This is the heart of the method the Buddha discovered—these states are not an end in and of themselves, unlike what his two teachers had taught him shortly after he'd left home to begin his spiritual quest.[7] They are simply a very useful way of preparing your mind, so you can more effectively examine reality and discover the deeper truths that lead to liberation.

a. Suan Mokkhabalarama (The Grove of the Power of Liberation), about six kilometers southwest of the village of Chaiya in southern Thailand. It was founded in 1932 by Ajahn Buddhadasa, and when I visited in 1988, it was to attend the ten-day retreat offered to foreigners each month.

b. Throughout this book, I will use *awakening* rather than the perhaps more familiar *enlightenment* since *enlightenment* is not an accurate translation, having been chosen by the early translators to suggest a connection with the European Enlightenment.

c. Although the word *noble* is a correct literal translation, it doesn't really capture all of what is meant. *Ennobling* would be far more elucidating, since practicing in accord with this path will ennoble you. But I will continue to use the more familiar *noble*.

d. From the PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* under *jhāna:* "Literally meditation. But it never means vaguely meditation. It is the technical term for a special religious experience, reached in a certain order of mental states."

e. See chapter 1, "The Preliminaries," and the web page on the precepts at http://rc.leighb.com/more/The_Precepts.htm for more detailed information.

f. For example, in the *gradual training* (see http://rc.leighb.com/more/The_Gradual_Training.htm), only the four jhānas are mentioned, and insight is done after the fourth. MN 66.25 indicates that the fourth jhāna is the first of the jhānas that "belongs to the imperturbable."

g. This statement is sure to be quite controversial. For more information on the controversy, see appendix 4, "In or Out: The Relationship between Jhāna Practice and Insight Practice."

PART ONE

Practical Jhānas

Introduction to Part One

AS MENTIONED in the preface, the jhānas don't really lend themselves to "book learning." Any description of them is a general description, and any set of instructions is an averaging of what typically works for people to enable them to enter these states and move between them. But everyone's experience is unique; every person comes to practice with their own mental habits, talents, and understanding. Thus any initial instructions often need to be tuned for each person's background and talents.

Jhānas are best learned on a ten-day or longer meditation retreat where the teacher describes the states in a general fashion and describes the instructions, again in a general way. Then the students have time to try out the instructions for themselves. It is extremely beneficial on such a retreat that the students, after playing with the instructions for a number of meditation periods, each have multiple one-on-one interviews with a teacher to refine both the student's understanding and implementation of the instructions. A skilled jhāna teacher can modify the instructions as the teacher comes to understand to some degree how the student's mind works. For some students, the instruction might be to sit longer; for others, to relax more; and for still others, to not be sloppy.

But if a teacher were to go back to the whole group and report all the advice dispensed in a day's worth of interviews, the students would most likely become

quite confused and probably think the teacher had become unhinged. Advice given to one student is exactly contrary to what another student needs to do, and the sum of all the advice would be a conflicting mishmash of confusion. This is why I say that the jhānas don't really lend themselves to book learning.

But here you are holding a jhāna book in your hands, presumably hoping to learn something. Certainly in reading this book you will have the opportunity to learn what the jhānas are plus also to read the general instructions for entering these states. And quite possibly you will attempt to follow these instructions either during your daily meditation period or on a longer residential retreat.

If you do try out these instructions, do so without expectations! Expectations are the worst thing you can bring on any retreat, and they are especially hindering when trying to learn jhānas. Additionally, if you are attempting to learn them from this book alone, you will not have direct feedback from a teacher of jhānas. Learning jhānas this way is not an impossible task, but it will certainly be a more difficult one.

With this caveat, let's now take a look at the jhānas as described in the suttas and at the instructions for entering them. Please remember as you go forward that what is presented here is one person's interpretations, opinions, and experiences; there are lots of other interpretations, opinions, and experiences about the jhānas these days. What I'm presenting here is my current understanding based on my own experience coupled with a close reading of the suttas.

1 The Preliminaries

> *Having taken up the rules of training, one trains oneself in them, seeing danger in the slightest faults. One comes to be endowed with wholesome bodily and verbal action, one's livelihood is purified, and one possesses moral discipline. One guards the doors of one's sense faculties, is endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension, and is content. (DN 2.44)*

THE *gradual training*,[a] found in numerous suttas,[1] is the most detailed description of the practices undertaken by those who sought to follow the Buddha's path all the way to liberation. In Majjhima Nikāya 107, the layman Gaṇakamoggallāna points out to the Buddha that many disciplines[b] have a training that gradually progresses from one step to another and asks if such a gradual training exists in the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha replies that it does and describes the step-by-step process that takes one all the way to awakening, with each step relying on the previous to train the mind to make it possible to accomplish the next step. The jhānas are an integral part of this gradual training, and the steps prior to the jhānas are the preliminary steps necessary for learning the jhānas.

The first step of the gradual training is hearing the true dhamma[c] and gaining confidence[d] that there is a method, a path, that can be followed to gain something more valuable than what the world has to offer. The Buddha didn't require belief—only a willingness to "come and see for yourself."[2]

The next step is building the foundation upon which all that follows stands: sīla, moral discipline, ethical behavior. The major ethical practice is the keeping of the precepts—227 for monks, 311 for nuns, but only 5 for lay people:

- To refrain from killing living beings,
- To refrain from taking that which is not given,

- To refrain from committing sexual misconduct,
- To refrain from wrong speech,
- To refrain from intoxicants.

These training rules are designed to enable you to lead a life that doesn't intentionally cause harm to others or to yourself. This moral discipline includes how you earn your livelihood as well as your relationships with family, friends, and strangers. Without this moral discipline as a foundation, none of the subsequent steps will be truly effective, and progress on the spiritual path ceases. For example, ethical behavior serves as a foundation for generating concentration by creating a life where there are not so many things you might feel remorse or worry about. For a more detailed discussion of the five precepts for lay people, see the web page "The Precepts" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/The_Precepts.htm.

You must also "guard the doors of the sense faculties" lest "evil unwholesome states assail" you.[3] This does not mean you don't look, you don't hear, and so forth; it means you do not get carried away by what you see, hear, sense, and cognize. Can you walk past a bakery, with its door open (of course), smell the wonderful aroma of the goods on offer, enjoy that smell, and yet not be tempted into entering and buying something? That's guarding the door of the nose faculty. The senses are totally necessary for navigating our environment—but they are not an amusement park, at least not if you are intent on developing the higher mind needed for liberation. It's perfectly OK to enjoy the pleasures that come via the senses—but don't let your enjoyment of them lead you to becoming even more entangled in the world of delusion. It's perfectly OK to respond to unpleasant sense contacts by dealing appropriately with the situation. But in neither case should the sense contacts lead to craving and clinging; if they do, then the sense doors are unguarded, and progress on the spiritual path is hindered.

It's also necessary to develop habitual mindfulness. We translate the word *sati* as "mindfulness," but we need to keep in mind that it is etymologically related to the Sanskrit *smṛti*, which means "memory." So being mindful means to remember. And what are we to remember? Be here, now. Pay attention to what's actually going on in the present moment, in the place where you are currently located. Now, this doesn't mean you should never plan for the future or learn from the past. But it does mean when doing so, you need to know that is what you are intending to do. In the gradual training, the Buddha suggests that you pay attention to your bodily activities throughout the day. When you are

attempting to learn jhānas, this unrelenting mindfulness is the most useful of all the practices[4] given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas. This practice itself won't generate sufficient concentration to enter a jhāna—but it will make it much more likely that any method that you do undertake to generate such concentration is actually effective.[e]

The last of the preliminary practices that occurs in the gradual training is being content with little. We unfortunately live in a culture that says that any less-than-perfect situation can be remedied by obtaining more of something—usually more of whatever the person doing the saying is selling. But the spiritual path is not about acquiring anything—it's all about letting go. There's nothing to get; there's everything to let go of. In general, throughout the two and a half thousand years of Buddhism, the jhānas were not considered a topic to be taught to lay people simply because it was believed their lives were far too busy to be able to undertake the meditation training necessary in order to learn the jhānas. But we now live in a culture with a huge opportunity for leisure, at least for some people. But we also have an unprecedented opportunity to fill up that leisure time with toys, entertainment, and other things that distract us from practice. A lay person does need more than three robes and a begging bowl, but a lay person in this culture absolutely does not need everything the culture has to offer. Leading a simple life makes it far easier to dedicate time for the practice that is necessary to progress on the spiritual path. Leading a simple life makes it easier to lead a life free from intentional harming. Leading a simple life makes it easier to abandon the five hindrances[f] that prevent you from entering the jhānas. Leading a simple life is living more in harmony with the limited resources available to all who live on our very crowded planet.

These four preliminary practices of keeping the precepts, guarding the senses, maintaining mindfulness, and being content with little are "off-the-cushion" practices that you need to make the four cornerstones of your basic way of life. Without the support of these practices, meditation "on the cushion" usually proceeds in fits and starts, if it proceeds at all. For learning jhānas, it really is necessary to have a quality daily on-the-cushion meditation practice worthy of the word *daily*, hopefully of at least forty-five minutes and preferably an hour or more. These four practices go a long way to making that possible.

a *Anupubbasikkhā*. In Ud 5.5, the Buddha says, "Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Dhamma

Discipline (dhamma-vinaya) has a gradual training (anupubbasikkhā), a gradual performance (anupubbakiriyā), a gradual progression (anupubbapatipadā), with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch." See also AN 8.19 & 20. The preliminaries of the gradual training are practices that begin the fulfillment of the noble eightfold path. For a detailed examination of the relationship between the gradual training and the noble eightfold path, see the web page "The Gradual Training and The Eightfold Path" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/The_Gradual_Training_and_The_Eightfold_Path.htm.

b The examples he gives include the steps of a palace, the brahmins, archers, and accountants (MN 107.2).

c *Dhamma* means both the teaching of the Buddha and "the way things truly are."

d *Saddhā*, usually translated as "faith" but perhaps more accurately as "confidence."

e See the following chapter on access concentration for information on generating sufficient concentration to enter the jhānas.

f See the web page "Abandoning the Five Hindrances" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Abandoning_the_Five_Hindrances.htm for more information on the hindrances.

2 Access Concentration

When one sees that these five hindrances have been abandoned within himself, gladness arises. (DN 2.76)

KEY PALI WORDS:

sutta	discourse, teaching
samādhi	indistractability, concentration

On any given retreat where jhānas are taught, some people will experience jhānas; some will not. The likelihood of you experiencing a jhāna is inversely proportional to the amount of desire you have for it. After all, the instructions given by the Buddha for practicing the jhānas begin, "Quite secluded from sense desire, secluded from unwholesome states of mind, one enters and remains in the first jhāna" (DN 2.77). In order to experience a jhāna, it is necessary to generate such seclusion, but actively desiring to experience a jhāna is not being secluded from the unwholesome mind state of craving. The setting aside of unwholesome mind states is known as *abandoning the hindrances. There* are five of these hindrances, usually listed as sense desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. They could also be listed as wanting, aversion, too little energy, too much energy, and doubt. The overcoming of these five unwholesome states of mind is the same as generating access concentration.

The Pali phrase *upacāra-samādhi*, which we translate as "access concentration," does not appear in the suttas.[a] But it certainly is a useful concept when discussing jhāna practice. The phrase *access concentration* means

concentration strong enough to provide access to the jhānas. It is distinguished from momentary concentration (khaṇika-samādhi), which is less concentrated than access concentration, and from fixed or one-pointed concentration (appanā-samādhi), which is the stronger concentration associated with the jhānas.

We could define *access concentration* as concentration strong enough that no hindrances arise. More practically, we can define *access concentration* as being fully with the meditation object, and if there are thoughts, they are wispy and in the background and don't pull you away into distraction. The general method for generating access concentration is to put your attention on a suitable meditation object,[b] and when your attention wanders off, gently bring it back. Keep doing this until the distractions fade away and your attention on the object is unwavering.

This recognition that you've become distracted and the returning your attention to the meditation object should be done without becoming upset that your mind has wandered off yet again. We are the progeny of countless generations of ancestors who had to not become totally fixated on what they were doing. Those who did become fixated didn't notice a predator, got eaten, and didn't reproduce. What we are trying to do goes against millions of years of evolution. Having a wandering mind is just how we are constructed. So it's no big deal when your mind wanders off; you should actually consider it a victory that you noticed it wandered, rather than a defeat that it did its natural thing of wandering. In fact it is extremely helpful if you intentionally relax when you notice you've become distracted, and then gently reestablish attention on your meditation object. The mind state you are aiming to create could well be called *relaxed diligence*.

It is not helpful to force your mind to remain fixed on the meditation object. It's not that this cannot be done; it's that doing so will generate a mind so tense and tight that it will not have the relaxed diligence necessary for entering the jhānas. The strategy is to place your attention on the meditation object and then be diligent about recognizing when you have become distracted. Drop the distraction; it might be helpful to label the distraction with a one-word label. Labeling helps you disidentify with the thought stream and provides insight into where your mind habitually goes when it becomes distracted. Just remember that the first label that comes to mind is always correct—spend zero energy trying to find the "perfect" label. Then—very important—relax, and return your attention to your meditation object.

If you are paying close attention to the content of your distractions, you will notice that most distractions fall into one (or more) of the hindrance categories. Sometimes all it takes is just being persistent in returning to the meditation

object for these hindrances to drop away. But sometimes a hindrance (or hindrances) turns out to be quite sticky. The five hindrances are discussed in detail on the web page "Abandoning the Five Hindrances" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Abandoning_the_Five_Hindrances.htm, and general methods for working with each of these hindrances are discussed there.

If you have an especially persistent, recurring hindrance, the general methods may not work. Sometimes it helps to give that particular distraction a funny name—like maybe "Rumpelstiltskin." Then you can dialogue with it when it shows up: "It's you again, Rumpelstiltskin. Well, this is not a good time for you to be showing up; please go away!" Giving it a funny name robs it of some of its power. Talking to it like a petulant child also weakens its hold.

If you are craving to experience a jhāna, you have the hindrance of wanting. You have to set aside such craving—those expectations—to be able to enter the jhāna. Setting aside expectations is certainly easier said than done. The best advice I can give you is to refrain from what Ayya Khema called "result thinking." Don't focus on what you hope or think or expect should happen. Ayya offered a simile that you might find helpful. Suppose you want to drive from your home to, for example, a retreat center many hours away. Suppose someone gives you excellent directions. If the directions start out by saying something like, "When you get to the end of your street, turn right. When you get to such and such a highway, turn left," it does you no good to start looking for the retreat center as you drive down your street toward the first turn. In order to use the directions properly, you don't focus on the destination; you determine where you currently are and what you'll need to do next when you arrive at the place where you change from what you are doing now to something new. This is exactly how to approach learning the jhānas. Gain an understanding of the directions. Determine where you currently are and what "landmark" to look for so that you will know when to take the next step. Don't focus on, or even think about, the destination.

The method for entering the jhānas begins with generating access concentration. You begin by sitting in a comfortable, upright position. It needs to be comfortable, because if there is too much pain, the unwholesome mental state of aversion will naturally develop. You may be able to sit in a way that looks really good, but if your knees are killing you, there will be pain and you will not experience any jhānas. So you need to find some way to sit that is comfortable. But it also needs to be upright and alert, because that tends to get your energy going in a beneficial way that keeps you awake. On the other hand, if you are too comfortable, you might be overcome with sloth and torpor, which is also an unwholesome mental state that of course is totally useless for entering the

jhānas.

So the first prerequisite for entering the jhānas is to put your body in a position that you can just leave it in for the length of the meditation period without having to move. If you have back problems or some other obstacle that prevents you from sitting upright, then you need to find some other alert position you can maintain comfortably.

Now, this is not to say you cannot move. It may be that you have taken a position and you discover something: “My knee is killing me; I have to move because there is too much aversion.” If you have to move, you have to move. Just be mindful of the moving. The intention to move will be there before the movement. Notice that intention; then move very mindfully, and then resettle yourself into the new position, and notice the mind working to get back to that place of calm that it had before you moved. It is very important that you not move unmindfully.

This process encourages you to find a position where you don’t have to move, because you’ll notice the amount of disturbance that even a slight movement generates. And in order to become concentrated enough to have the jhānas manifest, you need a very calm mind. Other things that can be useful after getting settled into your sitting posture are discussed in appendix 2, “Helpful Things to Do at the Beginning and End of Each Meditation Period.”

Generating access concentration can be done in a number of ways. This chapter and the next one will mostly talk about generating it using the breath, a practice known as *ānāpānasati. The* first word of this Pali compound, *ānāpāna*, means “in-breath and out-breath,” while the word *sati* means “mindfulness.” The practice is therefore “mindfulness of breathing.” [5] When practicing ānāpānasati, you put your attention on the physical sensations associated with breathing. It is extremely important to not control the breath in any way—just pay attention to the naturally occurring breathing. If you control the breath, it does make it easier to not become distracted. But it makes it too easy, and you won’t generate sufficient concentration to enter the jhānas.

It is probably better if you can observe the physical sensations at the nostrils or on the area between the nose and the upper lip, rather than at the abdomen or elsewhere. It is better because it is more difficult to do; therefore, you have to concentrate more. Since you are trying to generate access concentration, you take something that is doable, though not terribly easy to do, and then you do it. When noticing the natural, uncontrolled breath at the nose, you have to pay attention very carefully.

In doing so you will notice the tactile sensations, and then your mind will wander off. Then you’ll bring it back, and it will wander off; then you’ll bring it

back, and it will wander off. Eventually though—maybe not the next time you sit in meditation, maybe not even tomorrow or next week or next month, but eventually—you'll find that the mind locks onto the breath. You're really with the breath, and the mind is not wandering off. Any thoughts you have are wispy and in the background. The thoughts might be something like, "Wow, I'm really with the breath now," as opposed to, "When I get to Hawaii, the first thing I'm going to do is . . . ."

When the thoughts are just slight, when they're not really pulling you away and you're fully with the sensations of the breath, knowing each in-breath and each out-breath—this is the sign that you've arrived at access concentration. Whatever method you use to generate access concentration, the sign that you've gotten to access concentration is that you are fully present with the object of meditation. So if you are doing mettā (loving-kindness meditation), you're just fully there with the feeling of mettā; you're not getting distracted. If you're doing the body-sweeping practice, you're fully there with the sensations in the body as you sweep your attention over the body.[d] You're not thinking extraneous thoughts; you're not planning; you're not worrying; you're not angry; you're not wanting something. You are just fully there with whatever your object is. As you start to become concentrated, you might notice various lights and colors even though your eyes are closed. These are signs that you are starting to get concentrated. There is generally nothing useful that can be done with them—just ignore them. When you actually do get quite concentrated, the random blobs and laser light shows will disappear. They might be replaced by a diffused white light, which is a sign of good concentration. It always appears for some people, it never appears for others, and many people find it sometimes appears and sometimes does not appear. But again, there's nothing you need to do with that sign either—it's just a sign. When you drive into a town and see a sign saying, "Entering Citytown," you don't need to stop your car, get out, uproot the sign, and toss it in the trunk of your car; you don't need to do anything with the sign—it is just providing information about where you are. The diffused white light is a sign saying, "Entering Concentration-ville." Nice; just stay focused on your meditation object!

a The phrase *upacāra-samādhi* appears in the *Visuddhimagga*, where it occurs quite frequently.
b For more information on suitable meditation objects, please see below and also see appendix 3, "Access Concentration Methods."

c For more detailed instruction for working with mindfulness of breathing, see appendix 3.
d For more detailed instructions for working with mettā and the body sweep as access methods, see appendix 3.

3 Entering the Jhānas

From gladness, rapture arises. (DN 2.76)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
pāmojja	gladness, worldly joy
pīti	glee, rapture, euphoria, ecstasy, delight
sukha	happiness, joy

IF YOUR PRACTICE is ānāpānasati—mindfulness of breathing—there may possibly arise additional signs to indicate you have arrived at access concentration. You may discover that the breath becomes very subtle; instead of a normal breath, you notice you are breathing very shallowly. It may even seem that you've stopped breathing altogether. These are signs that you've likely arrived at access concentration. If the breath gets very shallow, and particularly if it feels like you've stopped breathing, the natural thing to do is to take a nice, deep breath and get it going again. Wrong! This will tend to weaken your concentration. By taking that nice deep breath, you decrease the strength of your concentration. Just stay with that shallow breathing. It's OK. You don't need a lot of oxygen because you are very quiet, both physically and mentally.

If the breath gets very, very subtle, or if it disappears entirely, instead of taking a deep breath, shift your attention away from the breath to a pleasant sensation. This is the key thing. You notice the breath until you arrive at and sustain access concentration, and then you let go of the breath and shift your attention to a pleasant sensation, preferably a pleasant physical sensation. There is not much

point in trying to notice the breath that has gotten extremely subtle or has disappeared completely—there's nothing left to notice.

If you arrive at access concentration (which, remember, is defined as being fully with the object of meditation and not becoming distracted even if there are wispy, background thoughts) and can maintain this access concentration for five to ten to fifteen minutes, you can also shift your attention away from the breath to a pleasant sensation even if the breath is still distinct. Whether you shift to the pleasant sensation because your breath has gotten too subtle or because you've been at access concentration "long enough," you will need a good bit of concentration to continuously notice a pleasant sensation. A mildly pleasant physical sensation somewhere in your body is not nearly as exciting as the breath coming in and the breath going out. You're experiencing this mildly pleasant sensation that's just sitting there; you need to be well concentrated to stay with it.

The first question that may arise when I say, "Shift your attention to a pleasant sensation," may be "What pleasant sensation?" Well, it turns out that when you get to access concentration, the odds are quite strong that, some place in your physical being, there will be a pleasant sensation. Look at most any statue of the Buddha: he has a faint smile on his face. That is not just for artistic purposes; it is there for teaching purposes. Smile when you meditate, because once you reach access concentration, you only have to shift your attention one inch to find a pleasant sensation.

Now, when I tell you, "Smile when you meditate," your reaction might be "I don't feel like smiling when I meditate." I know this because when they told me to smile when I meditated, my reaction was "I don't feel like smiling." OK, so you don't feel like smiling. Nonetheless, if you put a fake smile on your face when you start meditating, and keep putting it back on if it falls off, by the time you arrive at access concentration, the smile will feel genuine.

If you can smile when you meditate, it works very well for generating a pleasant sensation to focus upon once you've established access concentration; but actually, smiling seems to only work for about a quarter of the students I've worked with. Too many people in this culture have been told, "Smile whether you feel like it or not." And so now when I tell you, "Smile whether you feel like it or not," maybe your reaction is "No, I'm not gonna do that." OK, so you don't smile when you meditate. You'll have to find some other pleasant sensation.

Pleasant sensations can occur pretty much anywhere. The most common place that people find pleasant sensations when they've established access concentration is in the hands. What you want to do with your hands when you meditate is put them in a nice position in which you can just leave them. The

traditional posture is one hand holding the other, with the thumbs lightly touching. This is a quite excellent posture because it has a side effect of moving the shoulders back and lining up your spine nicely. When the hands are held like this, many people find that eventually there is a nice, tingly pleasant sensation that appears in the hands. But you can also put your hands in all sorts of other positions—just place them however appeals to you. After you've been "long enough" in access concentration, if you notice that there's a nice pleasant feeling in the hands, drop the attention on the breath and focus entirely on the pleasantness of that sensation.

Another common place people find a pleasant sensation is in the heart center, particularly if they're using mettā—loving-kindness—meditation as the access method. Just shift your attention to the pleasantness of that sensation. Other places people find pleasant sensations include the third eye, the top of the head, the shoulders—actually, you name a body part, and I've had some student find a pleasant sensation there that they were able to focus on long enough for the first jhāna to arise. It does not matter where the pleasant sensation manifests; what matters is that there is a pleasant sensation and you're able to put your attention on it and—now here comes the really hard part—do nothing else.

At first, what's most likely to occur is that either your mind wanders away from the subtle pleasant sensation or the pleasant sensation itself goes away. If your mind wanders away, as soon as you notice this, return immediately to the pleasant sensation. But if this wandering away is happening repeatedly, it's a sign of insufficient concentration; therefore, return to the mindfulness of breathing or whatever other access method you were using, regenerate access concentration, and stay longer in access concentration before once again turning your attention to the pleasant sensation.

If the pleasant sensation goes away, you don't really have any other choice than to return to your previous access method. The disappearance of the pleasant sensation is a sure sign of insufficient concentration. Again, regenerate access concentration, and stay longer in access concentration before once again turning your attention to the pleasant sensation.

It's also very important to let go of the breath when you make the shift to the pleasant sensation. The breath (or other meditation object) is the key to get you in—"in" being synonymous with establishing strong enough access concentration. When you come home from work, you pull out your key, you open the door to your home, and you go in. You don't then wander around with the key still in your hand—you put it back in your pocket or purse or on some table. You're not cooking dinner or watching TV with the key still in your hand! The key has done its job, and you let it go. It's exactly the same with the breath

or other meditation object. Totally let go of it, and focus entirely on the pleasant sensation. Of course, this is easier said than done—you've struggled for a long time to stay locked onto the breath, and now that you've finally managed to do so, the first thing you are told is to stop doing that. But that's the way it is—if you want to experience jhānas, it's going to be necessary to totally give yourself to fully enjoying the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation.

So you've found the pleasant sensation and fully shifted your attention to that pleasant sensation. You now observe the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation and do nothing else. If you can do that, the pleasant sensation will begin to grow in intensity; it will become stronger. This will not happen in a linear way. At first, nothing happens. Then it'll grow a little bit and then grow a little bit more and then hang out and grow a little bit more . . . . And then eventually, it will suddenly take off and take you into what is obviously an altered state of consciousness.

In this altered state of consciousness, you will be overcome with rapture . . . euphoria . . . ecstasy . . . delight. These are all English words that are used to translate the Pali *word pīti*. Perhaps the best English word for *pīti* is "glee." Pīti is a primarily physical sensation that sweeps you powerfully into an altered state. But pīti is not solely physical; as the suttas say, "On account of the presence of pīti there is mental exhilaration."[1] In addition to the physical energy and mental exhilaration, the pīti will be accompanied by an emotional sensation of joy and happiness. The Pali word for this joy/happiness is *sukha*, the opposite of dukkha (pain, suffering). And, if you can remain undistractedly focused on this experience of pīti and sukha, that is the first jhāna.

So to summarize the method for entering the first jhāna: You sit in a nice comfortable upright position and generate access concentration by placing and eventually maintaining your attention on a single meditation object. When access concentration is firmly established, then you shift your attention from the breath (or whatever your meditation object is) to a pleasant sensation, preferably a pleasant physical sensation. You put your attention on that sensation, and maintain your attention on that sensation, and do nothing else.

The hard part is the "do nothing else" part. You put your attention on the pleasant sensation, and nothing happens, so you might think to yourself, "He said something was supposed to happen." No, I did not say to make comments about experiencing the pleasant sensation. Or, you might put your attention on the pleasant sensation, and it starts to increase, so you think, "Oh! Oh! Something's happening!" No, don't do that—that will only make it go away. Or it comes up just a little bit, and then it stops, and you sort of try and help it. Nope, none of this works. Just simply observe the pleasant sensation.

You must become totally immersed in the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation. And I mean by this just what I say: the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation—the quality of the sensation that enables you to determine that it is pleasant, rather than unpleasant or neither. It's not the location of the pleasant sensation nor its intensity nor its duration. It's not whether the pleasant sensation is increasing or decreasing or staying the same. Just focus entirely upon the pleasant aspect of the pleasant sensation, and the jhāna will arise on its own. Now, admittedly, the sensation will be located in a particular area, and your attention will be aimed at that area. That's fine; just don't get caught up in the location; stay with just enjoying the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation.

All you can do is set up the conditions for the jhāna to arise, by cultivating a calm and quiet mind focused on pleasantness. And then just let go—be that calm, quiet mind focused on pleasantness and enjoy the pleasantness—and the jhāna will appear. Any attempt to do anything more does not work. You actually have to become a human being, as opposed to a human doing. You have to become a being that is simply focused on a pleasant sensation that is simply existing, and then the jhāna comes all on its own.

What you are attempting to do is set up a positive feedback loop. An example of a positive feedback loop is that awful noise a speaker will make if a microphone is held too close to it. What's happening is that the ambient noise in the room goes into the microphone, is amplified by the amplifier, and comes out the speaker louder. It then reenters the microphone, gets amplified even more, comes out louder still, goes into the microphone yet again, and so on. You are trying to do exactly the same thing, except, rather than a positive feedback loop of noise, you are attempting to generate a positive feedback loop of pleasure. You hold your attention on a pleasant sensation. That feels nice, adding a bit more pleasure to your overall experience. That addition is also pleasurable, adding even more pleasure, and so on, until, instead of getting a horrible noise, you get an explosion of pleasure that goes by the names of *pīti* and *sukha*.

Imagine that your mind is like a still pool—still because of the access concentration. Now drop in a pebble of pleasure. The ripples go out to the "sides of your skull" and bounce off and come back together. When they come together they reinforce each other, generating taller waves. But because this is not a real, physical system, if you don't disturb the system, the ripples stay taller and don't die out; they keep bouncing off the sides and reinforcing each other more and more. This is what we are after. But it requires that you not stir the water in the pool; doing so would spoil the bouncing and reinforcing effect, and the system would not keep generating higher waves.[a]

These are the instructions for entering the first jhāna. But don't expect the

necessary concentration to show up anytime soon. In fact, don't expect anything! Expectations are the absolute worst things you can bring on a retreat, and they are equally detrimental when practicing while not on retreat. Simply do the meditation method. And when access concentration arises, recognize it, sustain it "long enough," and then shift your attention to a pleasant sensation. Don't try to do the jhānas. You can't. All you can do is generate the conditions out of which the jhānas can arise. Recognize when you've established these conditions, and then patiently wait for the jhāna to come find you.

Possible Problems Associated with Attempting to Enter the Jhānas

> *It is not easy, living the household life, to live the fully-perfected holy life, purified and polished like a conch-shell. (DN 2.41)*

The path to experiencing the jhānas is not an easy one. There are a number of ways for things to go wrong, a number of ways to work very hard and yet not experience any jhānas. This section looks at some of the difficulties that might be encountered along the way to learning the jhānas.

The most common problem encountered is, rather obviously, insufficient concentration. This can arise from a number of different causes. The most common cause is what I term "jumping too soon." Someone manages to follow a few breaths in a row and immediately switches to some pleasant sensation. The concentration generated by "a few breaths in a row" is far too little to sustain attention on the pleasant sensation. The student becomes distracted and/or the pleasant sensation disappears.

Similarly, someone switches to a pleasant sensation as soon as one appears. They have not established access concentration and soon become distracted and are unable to maintain focus on the pleasant sensation or the pleasant sensation disappears.

Similarly, someone does actually generate access concentration but almost immediately switches to a pleasant sensation, maybe just as soon as genuine access concentration is recognized. But because the access concentration is not strong enough, the student becomes distracted or the pleasant sensation disappears.

The opposite problem arises a good bit less frequently, but it does occur. Someone generates quite good access concentration but keeps thinking that it's

not good enough and never lets go of the access method in order to switch to the pleasant sensation.

Much more likely is that someone generates quite good access concentration, switches to the pleasant sensation, but grows impatient. The impatience can lead to mentally commenting about how it's not working, which leads to distraction. The impatience can lead to trying to make the pīti arise by "doing" something rather than just *being* with the experience of the pleasant sensation.

All of the above problems are minor in the sense that they are fairly easily dealt with by tuning the student's patience—not too little, not too much, middle way. Learning the jhānas is very definitely a trial-and-error process—with lots of errors along the way. This is why it's good to undertake jhāna training while on an extended residential meditation retreat. A skilled jhāna teacher can, one hopes, easily recognize any of the above problems and offer suggestions to correct them—and the student has plenty of opportunities to try, try again.

Another somewhat commonly occurring problem when working with mindfulness of breathing is that someone gets nicely concentrated, the breath gets quite subtle, and then it feels like they just have to take a breath. Unless you are intentionally stifling your breath, you probably don't really have to take a breath. After all, most of the breaths you've taken during your life have not been taken under your conscious control. Your body knows how much oxygen you need and knows what to do to get it. If you can just ignore that feeling and trust that your system can take care of itself, that's probably best. But for people who get the feeling that they just have to take a breath, this suggestion seldom seems to work. More likely what is going to work is to take a slightly deeper breath. That will cause a slight setback on your way toward deep enough concentration, but not nearly as much as taking a big, deep breath. So take the slightly deeper breath, and return to letting the breath function automatically. Be patient—you might have to do several cycles of this on your way to deep enough concentration for the jhānas to manifest.

A similar problem is that a deep gasp occurs unexpectedly. This is a bit harder to solve. The best thing is to notice the precursors of the automatic gasp, and when you see it is getting likely that you will soon gasp, then intentionally take a slightly deeper breath to prevent the deep gasp.

A much more serious problem is that someone generates good access concentration, but when they attempt to switch to a pleasant sensation, there is none to be found anywhere in the body. This is a much more difficult problem to remedy. A pleasant mental sensation can certainly be used as the meditation object for generating pīti—but there are two major drawbacks: the pleasant mental sensation, which is most likely an emotion, is likely to have a story

connected with it that then leads to distraction, or the pleasant mental sensation is unstable and soon fades away.

If this is the problem you are dealing with, the best pleasant mental sensation to work with is the feeling of loving-kindness (mettā). If you cannot find a pleasant physical sensation after having definitely established good access concentration, switch to doing mettā practice for a few minutes. Does this generate a pleasant feeling in the area around the heart? If so, focus on that. If mettā practice generates any pleasant bodily sensation, use that. If you can stay focused on the feeling of mettā, without using words or distracting images, use the mettā feeling itself as the pleasant sensation. If mettā doesn't work for you, you can try doing gratitude practice and see if that will generate a pleasant sensation you can focus on. If gratitude doesn't work, you can try using a pleasant memory—a memory that brings a smile to your face. You are better off not planning what memory you'll use; just grab a happy one after your access concentration is well established, and see if you can sustain the happy feeling without getting caught in a story.

If the lack of a stable pleasant sensation persists, this problem may require more work than can be done during the retreat; it may require more time or a more psychological approach or both. What is sometimes going on is a persistent dysthymic-like mood. The psychological condition dysthymia has a number of typical characteristics: low drive, low self-esteem, and a low capacity for pleasure in everyday life. That may or may not be what's happening here, but raising the "capacity for pleasure in everyday life" does seem to be helpful in establishing the ability to find a pleasant bodily sensation once access concentration is established. One of the best methods for doing this is more mettā, more compassion, and more muditā (appreciative joy) practice. Also, neurologically, pīti and sukha seem to be accompanied by increased activity in the nucleus accumbens of the brain—the reward center. If your life doesn't seem to be very rewarding, then certainly changing your life so that you feel more rewarded will exercise the reward center, and this may help. Just be sure to choose wisely and wholesomely when picking activities that you hope will exercise the reward center.

Another problem that can block the arising of any jhāna is the inability to let go of attention on the breath. This may require practice over the course of a number of meditation periods. But if you are trying to focus on a pleasant sensation and on the sensations of the breath at the same time, you are obviously not focused on just one thing—which is what is required to generate access concentration. The simple solution is, of course, to *ignore the breath*. But maybe that's easier said than done. Keep trying.

Another possible solution to the above problem of not being able to let go of the breath is to find the breath itself to be pleasant. This involves a subtle shift from the physical sensations of the breath to the pleasantness of the breath. For some people, this works very well. For others, they just wind up continuing to track the breath without experiencing enough pleasantness to generate the pīti and sukha.

Another problem that some students face is fear of loss of control. It simply is not possible to enter the first jhāna and be in control during the whole experience. You have to let go and let the pīti take over. What sometimes happens is that someone generates quite good access concentration, switches to the pleasant sensation, and eventually the pleasant sensation begins morphing into pīti. And that experience can be accompanied by a sense that something unintended is happening in one's mental sphere—in other words, things are getting out of control. The fear generated in the face of this experience results in the person—intentionally or unintentionally—drawing back and shutting down the pīti, thereby blocking any jhānic experience.

If you are faced with the above reaction, the first thing to realize is that you have never actually been in control of anything ever. All that you are losing is the illusion of being in control! Jhāna practice is safe—if it were not, all the people today practicing jhānas on a regular and frequent basis would probably be dead by now. Furthermore, the Buddha highly recommended them—and he was very big on not causing harm. Now having said all this, practice of the first jhāna might be contraindicated for someone prone to seizures. There have been no studies done on this, and, as far as I know, there is no empirical evidence; I mention it only out of extreme caution. But unless you are prone to seizures, there is absolutely nothing to fear.

Now, assuring you that there is nothing to fear is probably not enough to make the fear entirely disappear. What seems to happen in these cases is that the student, feeling a bit more reassured, lets go into the out-of-control feeling a little deeper each time before intentionally or unintentionally drawing back. It's sort of like testing the waters to see if it's safe. And eventually they get so close to the pīti fully erupting that it does fully erupt, and they find themselves in the first jhāna—and still safe. The problem is then solved.

A more common problem than the preceding ones is that working with concentration—whether it is jhānic concentration, access concentration, or even a lesser form of concentration—can result in someone's unresolved psychological issues surfacing. All that energy that was being used to keep those issues at bay has now gotten quiet; all the hustle and bustle of a busy life has gone, and there is no longer the noise to drown out those issues. The arising of

such psychological issues is not a bad thing; in fact, it is actually a very useful thing. But it's not a pleasant thing! However, it is much better to have these issues surface where they can be dealt with, rather than have them lurking underground doing who knows what at a subconscious or unconscious level. But the arising of these psychological issues is a distraction for sure. They often generate aversion or some other hindering quality. They can be enough of an overriding issue that they cannot be set aside and have to be dealt with skillfully and immediately. This dealing with issues may take up all of one's time and energy and not leave the quiet, undisturbed mind that is needed to enter the jhānas. But the fact that these issues are now in the open and can be dealt with is a very valuable opportunity, and the work of dealing with them can begin at once. It is not uncommon for someone on a retreat to have an extremely profitable experience because they dealt skillfully with what surfaced; in fact they often have a more useful experience than if they had just been hanging out in the jhānas. Sometimes the issues get resolved during the retreat; sometimes they even get resolved "enough" to return to jhāna practice; more often the resolving of them is a longer-term project.

A problem that appears infrequently is experiencing a headache. If this happens to you, the first thing to check is to make sure you are not crossing your eyes. "Watching the breath" is occasionally subconsciously taken too literally.

More frequently a headache is due to "stuck pīti." This type of headache is almost always in the center of the head, as opposed to off to one side, and quite frequently in the center of the forehead or near the crown of the head. It seems to arise when someone begins generating pīti but that pīti has not yet erupted. Neurologically, there have been no studies done to ascertain what's going on in this situation, but the hypothesis is that the neurotransmitter(s), which are experienced as pīti when there is a sufficient concentration of them, are being generated, but not in a sufficient enough quantity for the pīti to arise. The most effective remedy if you are experiencing this type of headache seems to be to sweep your attention up your spine from your tailbone, up and then out of your head at the spot the headache seems the strongest. Each sweep should take about a half a second, and your attention should be traveling slightly faster at the end of the sweep than at the beginning. You are not trying to move anything up your spine other than your attention. Do this 10 to 12 times, and return to your meditation. Sometimes this will clear the headache; sometimes it will trigger the onset of pīti and thereby clear the headache; sometimes it does nothing. How and why it works when it works is not known.

Luckily most of the problems described above are rare. The most common one is not allowing the access concentration to grow strong enough before

shifting to a pleasant sensation—and that one has the easy remedy of patience. The second most common is some unresolved psychological issue surfacing. And although this can block access to the jhānas, it nonetheless is a valuable opportunity for growth. It seems that clearing away personal psychological issues is very helpful for preparing the mind for gaining the deeper transformative insights into the impersonal nature of reality.

a This of course is in no way related to what's actually happening from a neuroscientific perspective—it's only an imaginative way of expressing the idea of what is to be accomplished by the quiet focus on the pleasantness of the pleasant sensation.

4 First Jhāna

> *Quite secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, one enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and examining and filled with the rapture and happiness born of seclusion. One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with this rapture and happiness born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one's entire body which is not suffused by this rapture and happiness. (DN 2.77)*

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
pāmojja	gladness, worldly joy
vitakka	thinking
vicāra	examining
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy

THE JHĀNAS OCCUR in a large number of suttas,[a] not only in just the suttas that give the gradual training. The description is almost everywhere exactly the same. Occasionally you find it changed slightly, occasionally you find additional information given, but pretty much you find it's the exact same description over and over again. This makes sense given that suttas were preserved in an oral tradition and reciters learned particular patterns.[b] When a reciter got to a place in a sutta where it talked about A, the reciter recited pattern A, and when a reciter got to the part where it talked about J, the reciter recited pattern J. Thus a lot of detail and natural variability has most likely been lost.

Furthermore, the detailed instructions for the jhānas, which quite likely varied depending on the teacher and the students, really would not fit well into the oral literature. So what we have preserved for us is more like an outline. If the information in the outline was not sufficient for a student of the Buddha, the student would study with a teacher to learn the details. This and the following chapters are my interpretation of these details.[c] In Part Two, we'll take a more scholarly look at these details and their relationship to the words found in the suttas.

The first jhāna description starts: "Quite secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, one enters and remains in the first jhāna." As mentioned previously, this seclusion from sense pleasures, seclusion from unwholesome states, refers to the abandoning of the five hindrances, the five mental states that hinder progress on the spiritual path. The method for setting them aside is generating access concentration. Access concentration gets you to the point where, if there are thoughts occurring, they are wispy and in the background and they are not pulling you away into distraction. At that level of concentration, these hindrances will not arise.

In the gradual training, just before the description of the jhānas, frequently the suttas say, "When one sees that the five hindrances have been abandoned within oneself, gladness arises." In other words, when you generate access concentration, the gladness referred to here (the Pali word is *pāmojja*) is the mental state generated by the pleasant sensation that you're to put your attention on after having stabilized and deepened access concentration. With the hindrances out of the way, this is a pretty nice state. "From gladness, rapture arises": rapture (pīti) being the primary ingredient of the first jhāna. The unwavering attention on the gladness (the enjoyment of the pleasant sensation) generates the pīti, which is both the gateway to and the primary component of the first jhāna.

Ten the suttas describe the qualities of the first jhāna, "which is accompanied by thinking and examining and is filled with the rapture and happiness born of seclusion." These four qualities are often identified as factors of the first jhāna. The later commentaries assert that there are five factors, but the suttas only mention the four qualities, which are thinking and examining, rapture and happiness. The thinking and examining are translations of the Pali words *vitakka* and *vicāra. The* commentaries interpret these words to mean initial and sustained attention on the meditation object. Now, it's very true that in order to do any sort of concentrated meditation, you need initial and sustained attention on the meditation object. However, this doesn't appear to be what the Buddha is talking about: in the suttas, *vitakka* and *vicāra* always and only refer to thinking.[d] When

you generate access concentration and sustain it, there may be still a bit of thinking in the background—which can basically be ignored. This background thinking persists in the first jhāna and is what is being referred to by the words *vitakka* and *vicāra*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the move from access concentration to the first jhāna is to shift your attention to a pleasant sensation and stay with that as your object of attention, ignoring any background thinking. If you can stay with your undistracted attention on the pleasant sensation, then pīti will arise. The pīti, being the physical release of pleasant, exhilarating energy, could be anywhere from mild to quite intense. It can be finger-in-the-electrical-socket intense; it can be so intense that it's not even pleasurable. And hopefully the pīti is accompanied by sukha, which is an emotional state of joy, happiness. Both pīti and sukha are required in order for the experience to be classified as the first jhāna. And most likely, the experience brings a big grin to your face. The first jhāna is enough of an altered state that if you think some experience perhaps might be the first jhāna, it probably isn't—there's an unmistakable quality to the arising of pīti and sukha that lets you know for certain that something quite different is happening.

To remain in the first jhāna, stay focused on the experience of pīti and sukha. In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.10) we find, "Having reached the first jhāna, one remains in it. . . . At that time there is present a true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of seclusion, and one becomes one who is conscious of this pīti and sukha." The phrase "one who is conscious of this pīti and sukha" tells us that our object of attention is now the experience of pīti and sukha.

At first, it's really not easy to tell the pīti and sukha apart. This experience, this energy, this state, has come over you and grabbed your full attention. It is not readily apparent that there is an emotional component apart from the physical component, nor is it necessary to distinguish the two—yet. The experience may be much more one of pervasive pīti-sukha than one composed of intermingled distinct pīti and distinct sukha. As mentioned above, you may also find that there is a bit of thinking going on in the background. That's OK—it's the vitakka and vicāra, the thinking and examining, which are still lurking in the background of the first jhāna. Don't get distracted by the background thinking; stay focused on the experience of pīti-sukha. Maintaining this pīti-sukha experience and the focus on it constitutes the first jhāna.

You'll notice that the jhāna description says that the pīti and sukha are "born of seclusion." In other words, they arise from the fact that you have become secluded from the hindrances by gaining access concentration. Access concentration, or seclusion, is what generates the pleasant sensation, and

unwavering attention on it generates the pīti and sukha. It does not mean, as some people incorrectly say, that you have to go and seclude yourself in the forest. You just have to seclude your mind from the hindrances, and this is what will generate the pīti and sukha.

Once you have arrived at the state where the pīti and the sukha are sustained, the suttas say: “One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one’s body with this rapture and happiness born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one’s entire body which is not suffused by this rapture and happiness.” When you’re initially in the first jhāna, the pīti energy may seem to run up the spine and involve the back of the body, upper torso, and head more than anyplace else. Or maybe it’s just in the upper torso and head. Either of these is fine. Actually, when you are first learning, just get the pīti-sukha going and sustained; it doesn’t matter where it’s located or that it’s not yet throughout the body. Spreading it throughout the whole body is a more advanced practice. The pīti-sukha will probably feel like it’s centered more in the area of the face. Sometimes it’s most prevalent in the head, sometimes in the spine, but in general, it’s principally in the upper body area around the face. Then when you get skilled enough to stabilize the first jhāna, you’ll find that it is possible to move the energy into the arms and legs so that your whole body is filled with it. The method is to just move your attention from the location where the pīti feels the strongest to an area where it does not seem to be occurring, such as down an arm. You are not trying to move the energy; you are only moving your attention. Bring your attention back to the place where the pīti felt strong, and then notice whether the energy spread to the area where you moved your attention. Continue doing this in a gentle, unhurried way until the pīti and sukha fill the whole body. But please remember: this is an advanced practice; don’t worry about trying to spread the pīti and sukha immediately. Just get the pīti and sukha going, and see whether you can sustain them and sustain your attention on them.

For each of the first four jhānas, we have a simile. For this first one we find:

> Suppose a skilled bath attendant or his apprentice were to pour soap flakes into a metal basin, sprinkle them with water and knead them into a ball, so that the ball of soap flakes would be pervaded by moisture, encompassed by moisture, suffused by moisture inside and out and yet would not trickle. In the same way one drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one’s body with the rapture and happiness born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one’s body that is not suffused by rapture and happiness. (DN 2.78)

We have here a picture of what life was like at the time of the Buddha. You

didn’t go to the store and buy a bar of soap. You had your skilled bath attendant or his apprentice get a metal basin and pour soap flakes into it, pour water in, and then mix the soap flakes and the water until he had a ball of soap.

This picture matches quite well the frenetic energy of the first jhāna. The first jhāna is not a calm, peaceful state. Its energy is pretty intense, and this simile gives a fairly good idea of the lack of calm and of the frenetic energy that is present in the first jhāna. There’s an effervescent quality to the first jhāna that can also be gleaned from the simile. The particulars of the simile are that the soap flakes are like your body, and the water is like the pīti and sukha, which go throughout the body so that they are fully everywhere. As I’ve said, this occurs as you become more skilled. Your first goal should be to get the pīti and sukha going, and then sustain them. Once you are skilled at that, then hang out in the first jhāna and begin to play with it as described below, and finally see about moving it throughout the various parts of your body.

Another thing you can do in the first jhāna is play with the intensity level of the pīti. Once you’ve gotten to the point where you can stabilize it, see if you can decrease the level of intensity of the pīti and then bring it back up. You are, so to speak, finding a sort of mental volume control for the pīti. It is easier to bring the pīti down and then back up than it is to try to pump it up higher still. Besides, the pīti may be quite intense, and pumping it up higher may not be something you want to do. The method for decreasing the volume on the pīti is to give it a little less energy, a little less attention. Don’t pay quite as much attention to it, and it will begin to decrease. Once it comes down, put your attention fully back on it, and bring it back up. Once you are skilled in playing with the intensity level of the pīti, you can try to shut it off suddenly and completely, followed by immediately bringing it back. These skills will begin to give you mastery of the pīti that will be useful for learning the second and third jhānas.

The length of time you’ll want to stay in the first jhāna is inversely proportional to the intensity of the pīti. In other words, if the pīti is very strong, you probably won’t want to stay there very long. Half a minute or so might be sufficient, maybe even less than that if the pīti is seriously intense. If the pīti is not so very strong, then you might want to stay there five to ten minutes. The timing just depends on the strength of the pīti.

Pīti comes in a number of “grades.” It can show up as momentary pīti, which is like a shiver and then it’s gone. It can be minor pīti, which is a little tingly feeling that’s sustaining but not very strong and is more or less in the background. Minor pīti can also show up as gentle, involuntary rocking as you meditate. You might experience showering pīti, which is when you get a burst of pīti and then it’s gone, another burst and then that’s gone—the pīti is arising but

not sustaining. It can be uplifting pīti that makes your hair stand on end. It can give you a sense that you are levitating when it's really strong. I have had several students report opening their eyes to see whether they were indeed levitating. I'm afraid no one has ever reported getting off the ground. However, uplifting pīti can make you sit up very straight. The fifth kind of pīti is what I usually refer to as *full-blown pīti*. The correct translation is "all-pervasive pīti." This is the pīti that is everywhere. It's present, it's sustained, and you experience it throughout your body. It's the pīti necessary for the first jhāna; the other four types are pre-jhāna pīti, and they may or may not show up as you progress toward access concentration and then to the arising of the first jhāna.[1]

Pīti can manifest as rocking or swaying, or it can be very intense so that you are actually vibrating to the point where it is visible to others. It can manifest as heat and get very, very warm. Hopefully it has a pleasant aspect to it. Most often, it manifests as an upward rush of energy, often centered up the spine. I've talked with people who practice kundalini yoga, and it seems that pīti is the same energy. I've talked with people who practice *tummo*,[2] which is the Tibetan practice of generating heat, and I was told that this practice also involves generating the same sort of energy. It's a known, widespread phenomenon that is used in different ways. Here it is used to grab your attention and take you into a concentrated state due to it being so strong that it is easy to put your attention on it and absorb into the experience. The arising of pīti also has the nice side effect (for most people) of generating sukha, and, as we'll see, the sukha is the principal component of the second and third jhānas, as well as being a necessary part of the first jhāna.

So, you hang out in the first jhāna for a bit, depending on how strong the pīti is: if it is very strong, a half minute or so; if it is weaker, then maybe up to five or ten minutes. It should also be mentioned that when pīti first arrives, you may not have any control over the strength of it. It may come on ridiculously strong, or it may come on weak. I never know when talking with someone about their experiences in access concentration and working with the pleasant sensation just what is going to happen when the pīti finally does arrive, so just go with whatever shows up. The reason it can come on very strong the first time is somewhat like a can of soda pop. If you shake it for four or five days and then pop the top, it goes all over. The good news is that the next time pīti comes on, it won't have built up so much pressure, and it will not likely be that strong. If the first time you experience pīti is in the evening before going to bed, you will probably have trouble getting to sleep. It will wire you up. That's OK. You're learning, and missing a little bit of sleep is worth figuring out how to work with these valuable mental states.

For more scholarly information regarding the sutta description of the first jhāna, see the chapters in Part Two entitled “Vitakka and Vicāra” and “First Jhāna.”

Possible Problems Associated with Initially Learning the First Jhāna

> *Because on account of the presence of pīti there is mental exhilaration, and that state is considered gross. (DN 1.3.23)*

The following is not really a problem but bears mentioning: Very often when someone enters the first jhāna, their breath becomes very rough—there are short, sharp gasps that are very unlike the subtle breaths while in access concentration. This is totally normal! Once the pīti and sukha start rising, don’t worry in the least what your breathing does—it quite likely will change noticeably. Furthermore, your breathing may not settle back down until you move on toward the second jhāna.

Sometimes, having recently entered the first jhāna for the very first time, one finds that it is much harder to reenter the jhāna. This is usually caused by an increase in wanting—wanting the jhānic experience to reoccur—and the wanting is an instance of the first hindrance, so no jhāna appears. It is important to realize that for most people, when they begin learning the jhānas, they are not going to be experiencing the jhānas every meditation period. Again, the remedy is patience. At first, the mental effort required to generate sufficient concentration and the effort required to patiently wait for the jhāna once the attention has been switched to the pleasant sensation are definitely tiring. It’s not uncommon for someone to only be able to generate such effort once a day at first. As one becomes more skilled and more aware of exactly what is needed to generate the jhānas, the mental effort lessens and the jhānas arrive more frequently. Patience and the careful observation of exactly what one has done when the jhāna does appear are the keys to more frequent experiences of jhāna.

The most common problem associated with initially entering the first jhāna is that if it is done late in the evening, it may result in feeling too wired to go to sleep. This usually is a one-time problem most often occurring when someone actually enters the first jhāna for the first time after the evening dhamma talk—that is, right before bedtime. But losing some sleep—even if it’s a few hours—is a small price to pay for beginning to gain skill in these very useful states.

Occasionally one successfully enters the first jhāna, but the pīti seems like it's never going to go away. Not only is it not possible to turn down the pīti enough to enter the second jhāna, but the high-energy, buzzing feeling remains even when one gets up from the meditation session. This usually lasts only a few hours or a few days at most. It may generate some insomnia until it calms down; it is definitely an unpleasant condition. It is suggested that if this happens to you, go for a long vigorous walk; do tai chi, yoga, or some other stretching exercises; if possible take a long, hot bath; switch to doing gentle, slow loving-kindness meditation rather than continuing to work with deep concentration. Usually the pīti finally calms down after a good night's sleep—whenever that next happens.

The most serious problem that can arise when attempting to learn the jhānas is fortunately quite rare, occurring in approximately three students per one thousand. This is when the pīti gets stuck on and never seems to go away. This can last for weeks, months, even up to a year. Thankfully this is quite rare since there aren't any really effective solutions other than waiting the thing out. What does seem to help is getting grounded—vigorous exercise, manual labor, and eating heavy foods, like meat (assuming you are not a vegetarian), oils, cheese, and also chocolate.

If you have ever experienced "pīti stuck on," it is important that the next time you do enter the first jhāna, you move quickly toward the second jhāna almost as soon as the pīti begins to build. Don't let the pīti become too strong—take a very deep breath, and let it out completely with total relaxation as you do so; then shift your attention to the sukha, and make that the object of your meditation. Be careful to not let the sukha become too strong! Doing so will pop you back into the first jhāna with its strong pīti. More about this in the next chapter.

a The jhānas are mentioned in about half the suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya and in over a third of the suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya. There is a whole samyutta (collection) in the Samyutta Nikāya on the jhānas, and they are mentioned in many additional samyutta suttas, as well as in many suttas in the Anguttara-Nikāya.

b Pericopes: In rhetoric, a *pericope* is a "stock passage" of text that forms one coherent unit or thought, suitable for public reciting or reading from a text, now usually referring to sacred scripture. For more information about periscopes, see Anālayo, *Comparative Study*, 16–17.

c There are multiple interpretations of the sutta descriptions of the jhānas. See for example http://leighb.com/jhanantp.htm.

d See chapter 11, "Vitakka and Vicāra," for more information.

5 Second Jhāna

Further, with the subsiding of thinking and examining, one enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which is accompanied by inner tranquility and unification of mind and is without thinking and examining and is filled with rapture and happiness born of concentration. One drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one's body with the rapture and happiness born of concentration, so that there is no part of one's entire body not suffused by this rapture and happiness. (DN 2.79)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
vitakka	thinking
vicāra	examining
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy

THE THINKING, which was in the background of both access concentration and the first jhāna, subsides when one enters the second jhāna and is replaced by inner tranquility[a] and unification of mind.[b] As a practical matter, to move from the first jhāna to the second jhāna, you should take a nice deep breath and let it out slowly and totally, which will calm down the pīti yet leave the sukha strong enough so that you can focus on it. In the first jhāna, the pīti predominates and the sukha is in the background. To move toward the second jhāna, you want to do a foreground-background reversal. When you take the deep breath and deeply exhale, both the pīti and the sukha calm down in

intensity, but the pīti drops much more in intensity and is now low-grade and more in the background. The sukha, although perhaps now a bit less intense than it was before the deep breath, is still strong enough to now be the more prominent of the two. The “inner tranquility” mentioned in the description of the second jhāna reflects the shift from an experience of pīti and sukha to an experience of sukha and pīti.

Place your attention on the sukha—that sense of emotional joy/happiness—and stay focused on it. Its intensity may increase a bit, yet the experience will leave the pīti in the background as long as you don’t let the sukha increase too much in intensity. The inner tranquility is a much calmer experience than the experience of the first jhāna. Now let your mind collect on this sense of happiness. In the first jhāna, it is like holding a piece of paper with both hands upon which a marble has been placed; you have to really pay attention to hold it steady. But if you let the paper fold up around the marble, then it will stay there easily. This is similar to what is happening here. Your mind collects around the experience of happiness and settles into it, so that it’s much less likely to go wandering off. This unification of mind occurs as the thinking subsides and fades away.

You may not experience a level of concentration where the thinking shuts off totally on a retreat of less than a month (or perhaps even longer). Don’t worry about that; just get to the point where the sukha predominates and the pīti is in the background. If you can remain fully focused on the sukha, really giving yourself to this experience of happiness/joy, the thinking will indeed subside and fade more and more the longer you stay there without becoming distracted.

In the second jhāna, the pīti is going to be more like rocking or swaying than vibratory in nature—more like what was described as “minor pīti” in the chapter on the first jhāna. The pīti should remain at this minor level as long as you don’t let the sukha get too strong. What you want is sukha that is moderately intense and a mind that is strongly unified around this experience of sukha—in other words, moderate happiness/joy, strong one-pointed focus.

In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.11), we find that after one makes the transition from the first jhāna to the second, “one’s former true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of seclusion vanishes. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of concentration, and one becomes one who is conscious of this pīti and sukha.” Because the sukha is now in the foreground, it is the object of your attention, but you will be conscious of the minor, background pīti from time to time.

If you find yourself wandering back up toward the first jhāna, in that the pīti is beginning to increase in intensity, take an intentionally deeper breath, and once

again bring your attention back to the moderate happiness. In the suttas it says that thinking is a thorn to the second jhāna.[1] So to enhance your experience of the second jhāna, let yourself sink into the quiet stillness of the happiness and just be with it.

Again, the suttas provide a simile:

> Suppose there was a deep lake whose waters welled up from below, it would have no inlet for the water from the East, West, North or South, nor would it be refilled from time to time with showers of rain. And yet a current of cool water welling up from within the lake would drench, steep, saturate and suffuse the whole lake so that there would be no part of that entire lake which is not suffused with the cool water. In the same way, one drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with the rapture and happiness born of concentration, so that there is no part of one's entire body which is not suffused by this rapture and happiness. (DN 2.80)

Notice that in the second jhāna, the rapture and happiness are said to be born of concentration, rather than seclusion. The concentration of the first jhāna has given you the capacity to absorb into the second jhāna via totally giving yourself to the experience of sukha. The simile is of a lake with no streams coming in, no rain, but a spring at the bottom of the lake. This cool water wells up and fills the lake so that there is no part of the lake that is untouched by the cool water. This is an amazingly accurate simile; this is very much what the second jhāna feels like; only it's not cool water—it's happiness that is welling up.

The experience of the second jhāna seems to be located lower in the body than the experience of the first jhāna; it's more in the heart center for most people. It feels like the happiness is coming from your heart and welling up as from a spring. Now, this is not necessarily a steady state. Many people find that the happiness will tend to increase in intensity for a bit, come down for a bit, and then come back up. It ebbs and flows in a minor way and never fades out. To maintain the second jhāna, just hang out and stay focused on the sense of happiness.

The happiness in this state feels much like ordinary happiness. Imagine it's your birthday and someone gives you a very nice present. You open the present and exclaim, "Wow, this is great! I always wanted one of these," and you are really happy. The happiness of the second jhāna is this kind of happiness, but it isn't triggered by anything external; it's triggered by your concentrated mind. You have a gift within you, and the second jhāna enables you to experience it directly. The sukha initially arose from the concentration generated in access

concentration then being focused on pleasure. This brought the first jhāna, consisting of both pīti and sukha, with the pīti predominating. By spending some time in the first jhāna, you stabilized both the pīti and sukha. Now in the second jhāna, you chilled out the pīti and let the sukha dominate your experience. This now ebbing-and-flowing sukha in the second jhāna is a more tranquil experience, and your mind can now absorb into enjoying this sukha. The huge grin of the first jhāna has now likely become a nice big smile.

What you want to do is to be able to get to this state and be able to maintain it for at least 10 to 15 minutes. If you lose it by getting lost in thinking, just come back to the happiness. If you get distracted, the sukha won't entirely disappear at once—there quite possibly will be some weaker remnants of it hanging around when you notice that you've become distracted. Just put your attention on those remnants, and see if the intensity level will come back up to moderate. If not, or if indeed the sukha has completely disappeared, you will need to return to focusing on the breath, mettā, or whatever your access method was, regenerate access concentration, and try again. It is important to give yourself extended time in the second jhāna to let your concentration deepen; the objects of the following jhānas are going to be even more subtle than the sukha of the second jhāna.

For more scholarly information regarding the sutta description of the second jhāna, see the chapter in Part Two entitled "Second Jhāna."

More Possible Problems Associated with Attempting to Learn the Jhānas

To one in the second jhāna, thinking and examining are a thorn. (AN 10.72)

The most common problem encountered when learning the second jhāna results from the fact that the sukha is a more subtle object than the pīti of the first jhāna. It takes a more concentrated mind to be able to stay with this more subtle object. It sometimes happens that you generate strong enough access concentration to be able to enter the first jhāna, but when you move on to the second jhāna, you soon fall out of it. The solution is to stay longer in access concentration and let it deepen before moving to the first jhāna.

Often the distractions that pull you out of the second jhāna arise because the vitakka and vicāra (the thinking) have not really subsided. If you find thinking becoming active in the second jhāna, redouble your efforts to stay completely

locked onto the experience of the sukha—give yourself fully to enjoying the happiness/joy. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, on a retreat of less than a month, you are not likely to shut down the thinking entirely in the second jhāna—don't worry about that as long as that thinking is reduced from what you were experiencing in access concentration.

Sometimes what happens when you are trying to learn to enter the first jhāna is that you wind up bypassing the first jhāna unintentionally and end up going directly into the second (or an even higher) jhāna. This is not so unusual and arises when the focus on the pleasant sensation generates strong sukha and weak pīti. Don't worry if this happens to you—just stay focused on the sukha, and enjoy being in the second jhāna. After all, the purpose of the first jhāna is to generate the concentration that will enable you to get to the second jhāna. Usually when this bypassing happens, the vitakka and vicāra (the thinking) has not really subsided—just let your mind gather itself on the experience of sukha so that the thinking does start subsiding more and more.

It's somewhat like starting your car in second gear; you can do it, but you aren't really moving very well at first. So if you bypass the strong pīti experience and wind up having an experience of primarily sukha, just be patient and increase your unification of mind by staying completely focused on the sukha.

Sometimes, however, the access concentration level generated is very strong, and someone bypasses the first jhāna due to this strong initial concentration. That's like starting your car in second gear on a downhill slope—the strong access concentration providing the "downhill"—and the second jhāna initially is quite satisfactory.

If you unintentionally wind up in the second jhāna, stay in it for 10 to 15 minutes to let it grow deeper; then move on to the third jhāna. If this bypassing of the first jhāna keeps happening, stay in the second jhāna for about 5 minutes; then start cranking up the intensity level of the happiness, and see if that pops you "up" into the first jhāna with strong pīti and background sukha. This will give you a direct experience of your "target," and perhaps you can go now from access concentration to the first jhāna.

The reason for learning to go to the first jhāna even if you have good success going directly to the second jhāna is that often entering directly into the second occurs on a retreat when your concentration is exceptional. Your concentration won't be as good when you return home; there, it may be sufficient to enter the first jhāna but not strong enough to go directly into the second. So it's good to know how to get into the jhānas with less concentration, and that usually means knowing how to enter at the first jhāna rather than at the second.

After experiencing both the first and second jhānas, some students want to

bypass the first jhāna intentionally because it's too intense. If you want to do this and have sufficient concentration, that's fine. But as mentioned above, if you are doing this on a retreat, your concentration is quite likely to be less when you return home, and going directly to the second jhāna may be far more difficult. It's actually much more useful if you can enter the first jhāna very briefly (a few seconds—maybe even less) and then drop immediately into the second. This is best done by shutting down the pīti as soon as it starts to grow and switching your attention to the sukha. I'd suggest playing with doing the quick-foreground-pīti/drop-to-foreground-sukha-background-pīti and see if that prevents the overly intense pīti.

Very occasionally, after experiencing both the first and second jhānas, some students want to bypass the first jhāna intentionally because the intense pīti brings up painful memories. If this is happening to you, by all means skip the first jhāna. Negative mind states are always counterproductive when trying to generate concentration. Be kind to yourself.

a *Ajjhattaṃ sampasādanaṃ* is often translated as "internal confidence," but in the context of the second jhāna, "inner tranquility" is more accurate as it reflects the calming that takes place in moving from the first jhāna to the second and is in accord with the statement "when one's mind is filled with pīti, one's body becomes tranquil" (which is discussed in chapter 16, "The Jhāna Summary").
b *Ekodi-bhavam*, meaning "concentrated, attentive, fixed" and "become."

6 Third Jhāna

Further, with the fading away of rapture, one dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences happiness with the body. Thus one enters and dwells in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare: "One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness." One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with happiness free from rapture, so that there is no part of one's entire body that is not suffused by this happiness. (DN 2.81)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy

THE KEY THING that happens when you enter the third jhāna is that the pīti—the rapture—fades away. You are in a place where you are just happy. But, you are also in a state of equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending. The best word to describe this state is *contentment*. You are in a state of wishlessness, a state of satisfaction, and you want for nothing. This state is without pīti, so there is no sense of movement. You are very still and happy and hanging out in an ongoing state of wishlessness.

As a practical matter, to get from the second jhāna to the third jhāna, again take a deep breath and let it all out. As you do, dial down the intensity level of the happiness. You're in a bubbly, happy state in the second jhāna; to move to the third, you let that happiness become less intense and begin to fade. As it

starts to fade, it might be helpful to remember a time when you were very contented. As an example, you might remember a time when you'd just eaten the perfect meal, you didn't overeat, and you don't have to wash the dishes. Remember the incident briefly—a quarter of a second—and pluck the feeling of contentment out of it. As the happiness of the second jhāna continues to decrease in intensity, put your attention on that feeling of contentment, let the decreasing happiness become that contentment, and let the contentment become the focus of your attention.

At this point, there should be no pīti left at all. The third jhāna is a very still state. There is no sense of movement and the feeling of contentment is rock steady. It usually is not necessary to do anything directly to make the pīti vanish; it seems to fade away on its own as your mental system calms down from happiness to contentment. If there are remnants of pīti left, you didn't quite make it to the third jhāna; you're just in a quieter second jhāna. If this is the case, it's probably good to bring the intensity of the contentment back up to happiness, reestablish your "normal" second jhāna with its foreground sukha and background pīti, and then try again to move to the third jhāna.

The third jhāna is less energetic and feels lower in the body, more toward the belly level. In fact, there is a strong sense of the locus of each jhāna moving physically downward as you go up in the numbers. When someone tells me they went down to the next jhāna, I have to ask if they went down in number from, say, second to first or down in feeling from second to third. The physical sense of descending is so strong that it overrides the idea of going up in number.

Again we have a simile:

> Suppose in a lotus pond there are blue, white or red lotuses that have been born in the water, grow in the water and never rise up above the water, but flourish immersed in the water. From their tips to their roots they would be drenched, steeped, saturated and suffused with water so there would be no part of those lotuses that is not suffused with water. In the same way, one drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one's body with the happiness free from rapture so there is no part of one's body which is not suffused by this happiness. (DN 2.82)

The simile is of lotus blossoms that grow up out of the mud but do not come above the surface of the water. They live their entire lives immersed in the water, completely saturated with water. This is a very still picture. The lotuses are not waving around in the breeze; they are not moving with ripples on the pond—there is no movement at all. This is an accurate description of the third jhāna—

you are immersed in a sense of contentment with no sense of movement. Being underwater also points to a sense of isolation, which is now beginning to appear as your mind grows even more concentrated.

Once again in the third jhāna, as with the first and the second, the idea is to become so skilled that the sukha—the contentment, which is what the sukha feels like now—seems all-pervasive. And again, don't worry about this when you are first learning the third jhāna. Just get stabilized on the feeling of contentment and hang out while focused on it. Then, when you gain skill at that, you'll find it's not difficult to move it so that it permeates your whole body.

Because the pīti has faded out, this state is a much nicer place to spend time. The sukha still has its nuance of happiness, and that happiness is felt throughout your whole being. The equanimity mentioned in the description of the third jhāna is felt as an unruffled quietness. You don't want anything, nothing is disturbing you, and you sit there with a faint Buddha-like smile on your face. To become skilled in this state, you should learn to maintain it for at least 10 to 15 minutes.

In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.12), we find that after one makes the transition from the second jhāna to the third, "one's former true but subtle sense of pīti and sukha born of concentration vanishes, and there arises at that time a true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness, and one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness." Now the object of attention is the "equanimity and happiness," which can be described best with the word *contentment*.

It is very good to practice moving among the jhānas by going both forward and backward. Once you have learned the third jhāna, try going back "up" to the second jhāna—it will feel like it is physically up, even though the number goes down. The method for doing this is to let the contentment become really, really content—add some excitement to the feeling. This should pop you back up into the second jhāna. You also can go back "up" from the second jhāna to the first. Just let the happiness get more and more happy, even giddily happy—that should bring back up the strong pīti, and you'll find yourself back in the first jhāna. Once you have mastered going both up and down, try moving through the jhānas like 1-2-3-2-3-2-1. Entering a jhāna from both "above" and "below" gives you a clearer picture of exactly what are the qualities of the jhāna, which then enables you to settle more deeply into it.

For more scholarly information regarding the sutta description of the third jhāna, see the chapter in Part Two entitled "Third Jhāna."

Possible Problems Associated with Learning the Third Jhāna

Rapture is a thorn to the third jhāna. (AN 10.72)

The most common problem in trying to learn the third jhāna is that the pīti won't fade away. Rather than entering the third jhāna, you're still in the second but with the sukha intensity turned down. It can never be the third jhāna as long as the pīti remains.

As mentioned in the previous section, the first strategy to try is to return to a more normal second jhāna, hang out there for a few minutes, and then try again to enter the third jhāna. If this doesn't work, sometimes it is helpful to return briefly to the second jhāna and briefly to the first jhāna. As soon as the pīti of the first jhāna is well established, try making it as strong as you can for only a second or two, and then take the deep breath and move toward the second jhāna. Hang out there until the background thinking quiets again; then once more try to enter the third jhāna.

If none of the above work, the next time you move from access concentration to the first jhāna, quickly take the deep breath and move on toward the second jhāna without letting the pīti get so strong. Spend an extra amount of time in the second jhāna before attempting the third again.

Of course if you are dealing with pīti that remains even after you get up from meditating, you are not likely to get it to shut down when you want to go from the second jhāna to the third. In this case you are just going to have to wait out the pīti until it disappears when you are not meditating. Then when you resume your jhāna practice, only stay in the first jhāna a very brief time before taking the deep breath and moving toward the second jhāna.

Another common problem is that the pīti returns after you have been settled in the third jhāna. In that case just ride the experience back up to the second jhāna, stabilize it and hang out in the second jhāna for a few minutes, and then reenter the third jhāna.

7 Fourth Jhāna

Further, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and grief, one enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither pleasant nor painful and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity. One sits suffusing one's body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of one's entire body not suffused by a pure bright mind. (DN 2.83)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
adukkha and asukha	neither painful nor pleasant, neither unhappiness nor happiness
somanassa and domanassa	joy and grief
sati	mindfulness
upekkha	equanimity

In the third jhāna, the focus is on a sense of contentment, and contentment is a pleasant mind state. To move to the fourth jhāna, you want to let go of that pleasure and let your mind go to neutral. When it says, "The abandoning of pleasure and pain and the passing away of joy and grief," it should not be thought that there was pain or grief in any of the previous jhānas. There was certainly pleasure in the first three and joy in the first two. Those need to be gone, but not replaced by pain or grief. The aim here is to attain an emotionally neutral state such that your equanimity can fully purify your

mindfulness.

As a practical matter, to enter the fourth jhāna, let go of the pleasure of the third jhāna, and hopefully when you do so, there will be a sense of things starting to physically drop down. Go with this sense of dropping down, and continue to let it drop. In the third jhāna, you may find you have a faint smile, a Buddha-like smile. If so, all you have to do is relax the muscles of your face. Both the smile and the sense of pleasure disappear; then usually a sense of things starting to drop down follows. Just stay focused on that sense of dropping, which can continue for quite some time. Eventually the mind settles into a place of quiet stillness. The words in the sutta description are "neither pleasant nor painful" and "equanimity," but it may not be clear what it means to focus on this. A feeling of *quiet stillness* is the best way to describe the experience of the fourth jhāna, and that sense of quiet stillness now becomes the focus. These words simply mean that the fourth jhāna is an emotionally neutral state. There is no pleasure and no pain, only the quiet stillness. The fourth jhāna requires a bit more letting go than any of the previous ones, so let go of anything you are holding on to—that is, fully give yourself to the experience.

Ayya Khema said that being in the third jhāna is like sitting in the mouth of a well—you are a little bit isolated from the world around you. To enter the fourth jhāna, drop down the well to the bottom.[1] Since the fourth requires more letting go than the previous jhānas, don't think of climbing down the well; just let go and drop. The sense of dropping down isn't like a free fall; it's more like drifting down, perhaps like drifting down to the bottom of a swimming pool—another possibly helpful image: in the third you are just under the water; in the fourth you drift down to the bottom. Or in the third you are sitting in the mouth of a cave, and in the fourth you go deep inside the mountain (and the cave has a downward sloping floor).

The feeling of dropping down is so pervasive that you might find yourself physically slumping over. This is a quite common experience and nothing to worry about. As you move from the third jhāna into the fourth, just let go into the feeling of dropping down, and if your body also droops over, let it go into that slump as well. It's true that being in such an awkward posture for an extended period of time is not a physically healthy thing to do, but don't worry about it when you are first learning the fourth jhāna.

When you feel like you are able to establish the fourth jhāna on a regular basis, then you can start working on slumping less. The trick is to allow yourself to slump as you start your "descent" toward the fourth. Then when the slumping gets pronounced, pull yourself physically more upright. This will lessen your concentration a bit and temporarily pause your descent into the depths of the

fourth jhāna, but immediately let go again into the sense of dropping down—and let the slumping resume. By repeating this process, you should be able to get all the way down deeply into the fourth jhāna and wind up merely slouching rather than slumping.

In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.13), we find that, after one makes the transition from the third jhāna to the fourth, "one's former true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness vanishes, and there arises a true but subtle sense of neither pleasure nor pain, and one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle sense of neither pleasure nor pain." Now the object of attention is the even-mindedness of neither pleasure nor pain, but since that is difficult to direct your attention to, direct it to the sense of quiet stillness, and you will automatically be focused on "neither pleasure nor pain."

To be skilled in this state, again you should be able to maintain it for at least 10 to 15 minutes like you did for jhānas two and three. When the fourth jhāna is done well, it is an incredibly restful state. We spend our days thinking and doing and our nights either dreaming or oblivious. Finally now you are in a state where you are fully conscious and almost nothing is happening. Upon emerging from a deep fourth jhāna, you might feel refreshed as though you'd just taken a short nap—but you will be quite certain that you were not asleep. This is a valuable place in and of itself to spend time, given the hectic nature of twenty-first-century civilization.

Once again we have a simile:

> Suppose a man were to be sitting covered from the head down by a white cloth so there would be no part of his entire body not suffused by the white cloth. In the same way, one sits suffusing one's body with the pure, bright mind so that there is no part of one's entire body that is not suffused by a pure, bright mind. (DN 2.84)

The simile is of a man sitting with a white sheet over his head, completely covering him. He's a little isolated from the world around him. The deeper the level of concentration that you bring to the fourth jhāna, the more the sense of isolation and withdrawal from the world around you. It may happen that sounds seem farther away as you get deeper into these states. If your concentration is exceptionally strong, sounds may disappear altogether.

If your concentration level is not exceptionally strong, the reason the simile mentions a "white cloth" and the description uses the word "bright" may not be clear. However, if you spend far more than the 5 to 10 to 15 minutes in access concentration recommended in the chapter "Entering the Jhānas," the diffused

white light mentioned in the chapter “Access Concentration” will become quite steady and strong. After spending an hour or two or three in access concentration, if you then enter the jhānas and work your way down to the fourth one, you will find that your visual field is filled with a bright whiteness, just as if you were sitting in an open field on a sunny day, covered from head to toe with a white sheet and you had your eyes open. At that level of concentration, the simile makes perfect sense.

Understanding this simile also points to the level of concentration that the Buddha and his monastics were working with—and that level of concentration is far more than you are likely to generate in a ten-day retreat. At the time of the Buddha, after the monks and nuns finished their alms rounds, they would eat their midday meal, which would be at around ten or eleven o’clock in the morning. Then they would “go for the day’s abiding”[2] and meditate until evening. They probably were not doing 45 minutes of sitting, 45 minutes of walking. These were people who had not grown up with chairs and thus had the capacity to sit cross-legged for an extended period of time. So if they were sitting for multiple hours at a time, over a six- or seven-hour period, they were far more likely to experience a very deep level of concentration. By the time they entered the fourth jhāna, their concentration was deep enough that the simile with its white cloth captures the pure, bright mind they were experiencing.

Unless you are on a retreat of a month or more and are willing to spend an hour or more in access concentration before entering the first jhāna, it will be difficult to reach that level of concentration. But even at a lesser level of concentration, the jhānas are very useful. So don’t worry if your visual field is dark rather than white. If you can remain focused on quiet stillness with an equanimous mind, you will generate deep enough concentration to have a strongly enhancing effect on your subsequent insight practice.

For more information about generating the depth of concentration necessary for experiencing the bright white visual field and the strikingly pure, bright mind, see the last question in appendix 1, “Frequently Asked Questions.”

Notice also that now “one sits suffusing one’s body” rather than “one drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one’s body.” Clearly things have calmed down quite a lot in the fourth jhāna. Once again in the fourth jhāna, as in the previous jhānas, the idea is to become so skilled that the quiet stillness seems all-pervasive. And again, don’t worry about this when you are first learning the fourth jhāna. Just learn to stabilize your attention on the feeling of quiet stillness for ten to fifteen minutes. Then, when you have become skilled at that, you’ll find it becomes all encompassing simply by directing your attention throughout your body.

It's also going to be helpful to move up and down through the jhānas: 1-2-3-4-3-2-1 or even 1-2-3-2-3-4-3-4-3-2-3-2-1. Most people find going back "up" to the third jhāna quite easy—just remember what contentment feels like, and make that the object of your attention, adding in a dash of pleasantness. This should pop you back up to the third jhāna. As you go "up" to a lower-numbered jhāna, that lower-numbered one should be stronger than before because you are more concentrated due to having been "down" in the higher-numbered jhāna. If this increased strength is not immediately noticeable, just be patient and let the jhāna experience deepen. The one exception is the first jhāna—the pīti will usually be far less strong than when you initially entered the first jhāna. This is actually a good thing—especially since the strength of a jhāna is not measured by the strength of the primary quality, but by the strength of your indistractable attention upon the primary quality.

Also after you have become skilled in these jhānas, it is not necessary to spend the 10 to 15 minutes in each one every time. Just make sure that you don't always shortchange the same jhāna(s) (although you might always be spending a very short time in the first jhāna before taking the deep breath to move on toward the second jhāna).

For more scholarly information regarding the sutta description of the fourth jhāna, see the chapter in Part Two entitled "Fourth Jhāna."

Possible Problems Associated with Learning the Fourth Jhāna

In-and-out breathing is a thorn to the fourth jhāna. (AN 10.72)

The quiet, still, neutral state of mind that is the object of the fourth jhāna is considerably more subtle than the objects of the previous jhānas. This makes it more difficult to maintain your attention on it. If you find that you are frequently becoming distracted from the fourth jhāna experience or if the background thinking begins to kick in again, it's a sure sign that your concentration level is not strong enough. The best remedy, and the only real long-term solution, is that the next time you are in access concentration, stay longer in access concentration before entering the first jhāna. It is possible to enter the first three jhānas having generated sufficient concentration while in access, but not having generated sufficient concentration to stabilize the fourth jhāna. Counteract this by staying longer in access concentration.

A possible short-term, in-the-moment solution to an unsteady fourth jhāna is to go back “up” to the third jhāna. Hopefully since you are coming from a more deeply concentrated state, you will now experience a deeper third jhāna than before. Stay there for five minutes or more, really giving yourself to the feeling of contentment, and then try again to enter the fourth jhāna. That should give you a more stable experience of the fourth.

Because the fourth jhāna is such a quiet place, your breathing may once again draw your attention—this is of course the thorn being spoken of in the quote above. It is really important if you want a high-quality experience of the fourth jhāna that you ignore your breathing. If you do find your mind wandering to the breathing—which may be less subtle than quiet stillness—you must immediately return your focus to the quiet stillness. If the problem persists, you just don’t have sufficient concentration; so try the remedies mentioned above.

Another possible difficulty encountered in the fourth jhāna is that it is such a restful place. If your energy level is not high enough to match your now quite deep concentration, you are likely to fall asleep in the fourth jhāna. If this happens, when you wake up, it probably is going to be a better use of your time to immediately switch to doing an insight practice rather than persisting with doing something you don’t have the energy for. It may even be necessary to apply some of the antidotes to sloth and torpor mentioned on the web page “Abandoning the Five Hindrances” at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Abandoning_the_Five_Hindrances.htm.

8 Insight Practice

> *When one's mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, one directs and inclines it to knowing and seeing. One understands thus, this is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion, and this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it. (DN 2.83)*

THE PURPOSE OF THE JHĀNAS is to generate a mind that is concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, which you can then direct and incline to knowing and seeing. Knowing and seeing what? Body and mind. The jhānas provide you with a mind that can do insight practice more efficiently; they are a warm-up exercise for investigating your body and your mind. Whatever your insight practice is, whatever method you choose to investigate your body and your mind, it will be more effective with a mind that is concentrated, bright, wieldy, and so forth.

We can define an insight as an "understood experience." If you've never tasted a mango and someone describes a mango to you—it's a yellow-orange fruit with a big seed in the middle, you have to peel it, the inside is yellow and juicy and very sweet—do you have any idea what a mango tastes like? Of course not—you think it's a peach! But if you bite into the mango—if you have the experience of tasting a mango—then you know what it tastes like (although of course you only know that's what a mango tastes like if someone tells you that's a mango). You need both—the understanding and the experience. Understanding without any corresponding experience is useful, but not transformative. Experience without understanding is baffling. We need both to progress on the

spiritual path. Insight practices are practices—both on and off the cushion—that aim to give us experiences of the true nature of the world in a context such that we can understand them. A partial list of insight practices can be found at http://rc.leighb.com/more/A_Partial_List_of_Insight_Practices.htm.

Insights might be personal—for example, an understanding of a problem you are trying to resolve, or a psychological understanding of why you respond in a certain way to a particular situation. These insights are indeed helpful. In fact a psychological insight may be critical to clear the way to gain deeper, more transformative insights. But deeply transformative insights are impersonal. They are understood experiences of the impermanent, ultimately unsatisfying, empty nature of the universe.

The method for waking up on the spiritual path is to let go, and in order to let go, you need to become convinced there is nothing worth hanging on to—in fact there is nothing you can hang on to. In order to become convinced, you need to investigate reality with a sharp, concentrated mind to clearly see the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and corelessness characteristics of both yourself and the world around you.

One of the things that is most helpful when investigating the nature of reality is to be able to do so from a less egocentric perspective. Normally we approach the world in terms of "Is this something *I* want, or is this something *I* need to get rid of?" It's all about "me," "my wants," "my fears." But although it does seem from a naïve perspective that the world revolves around "me," it's just not so. Practicing the jhānas, with their focus on a series of increasingly subtle objects, quiets down the normal ego-making processes. When you emerge from the jhānas, the ego making does not immediately spring back full-blown—you have some period of time to investigate the world from a much less egocentric perspective. That gives you a far better chance to see what is actually happening instead of seeing the world in terms of your advantages and disadvantages.

This newly generated, less egocentric viewpoint with its pure, bright, malleable, wieldy mind is a temporary experience, and your mind will soon return to its usual egocentric wants and worries. The amount of time this new, more useful viewpoint is available to you is dependent on how much concentration you generated in the jhānas and what you do upon emerging from the jhānas. The very best thing possible to do is to continue your sitting meditation, but now switch to doing some insight practice, some practice of investigating reality. The Buddha recommends that practice be something that helps you understand the characteristics of your body and mind, to see their interdependent relationship and their impermanent nature. For example, the practices given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the four establishments of mindfulness,

are one establishment of body, three establishments of mind—exactly what is to be investigated with your concentrated mind.

Waking up is a difficult task. It's probably more difficult than cutting a wooden table in two with a dull butter knife. If you really wanted to cut a table in two with a butter knife, you could probably do it. If you pressed really hard, you could make a little dent in it right away. If you kept working and pressing, you could cut that table in two with that dull butter knife. But it would be really hard work and would take a very long time. However, if you were to get a whetstone and put an edge on that butter knife, sharpening it up, then you could cut a lot faster. You would quickly make up all the time you "wasted" putting an edge on the knife. Of course, after a while the edge would become dull, and you'd have to sharpen it again to keep cutting. Undoubtedly you could cut that table in two a lot faster with a sharp butter knife than with a dull butter knife. The purpose of the jhānas is to sharpen your mind, so that when you look to see what's really happening, you have penetrating insight into it.

In the Tibetan tradition, the bodhisattva of wisdom is Mañjuśrī. Mañjuśrī is often depicted with a sword of wisdom in his right hand, which he uses to cut the bonds of ignorance. Jhāna practice is simply sharpening Mañjuśrī's sword.[a] By moving though the jhānas, you are making your mind sharp. You haven't cut any bonds of ignorance yet; you still have to wield the sword—that's your insight practice. But if you spend all your time sharpening your sword and never wield it, you never cut any bonds of ignorance—and eventually you'll have no sword left because you would have sharpened it into oblivion.

The transition from the jhānas to insight practice is extremely simple. Stop focusing on the object of the jhāna—for example, the quiet stillness of the fourth jhāna—and start doing your insight practice, whatever it is. You don't have to go backward to the first jhāna and then to access concentration in order to begin. In fact it works best if you begin doing your insight practice from the highest jhāna you know—that's when your concentration is strongest. The sense of the jhāna will remain for at least a few moments, if not longer, when you begin your insight practice, but it will fade away as you continue your insight practice. That's perfectly OK. The jhāna has done its job and gotten you strongly concentrated; let it go, and use your concentrated mind to investigate reality.

It is very helpful when you first sit down to begin your meditation practice to decide what insight practice you will undertake after you emerge from the jhānas. That way you don't waste any time thinking, "Now what should I do?"—you know what to do with your concentrated, sharp mind. If upon emerging from the jhānas, you really want to do some other practice than the one you decided upon at the beginning of your sitting, it is OK to change your mind once. But

whatever insight practice you begin, do continue that insight practice until the end of that meditation period.

What the Buddha discovered was that just doing jhāna practice wasn't sufficient. That's what his first two teachers were teaching him; he left them because concentration practice alone wasn't answering his deep spiritual questions. His genius was in discovering the mind-sharpening capabilities of the jhānas and then knowing how to wield that sharp mind to uncover dependent origination, formulate it in terms of the four noble truths, and then teach it to the rest of us. The jhānas are a warm-up exercise for your insight practice.

For more information regarding the sutta description of insight practice, see the chapter in Part Two entitled "Insight Knowledge" and the web page "A Partial List of Insight Practices" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/A_Partial_List_of_Insight_Practices.htm.

The Two Types of Insight Practice

There are two basic categories into which insight practices can be divided: meditations and contemplations.

Meditations

Meditation techniques involve the wordless, or nearly wordless, examination of some sort of sensory input. It is usually easier to stay focused and not become distracted when doing an insight meditation. And it is easy to recognize that you have become distracted: if you notice thinking happening, you can let go of the thinking and come back to the meditation object.

Contemplations

Contemplation techniques involve thinking about a specific topic. The particulars of a topic may come from sensory input (e.g., contemplating the four elements via sight and touch), or the particulars might come from remembering a teaching and pondering the implications of it (e.g., contemplating dependent origination or contemplating the five daily remembrances given in AN 5.57). It is more difficult to recognize a distraction when contemplating than when meditating since obviously not all thinking is a distraction when contemplating.

It is helpful when a contemplation has a word, phrase, or sentence that serves as an initial key to beginning that contemplation. When you recognize a distraction, you can rethink the key to get settled in again.

Both of these are ways of using your jhānically concentrated mind to investigate reality. It is beyond the scope of this book to provide more detail than this—fortunately there are many resources available for learning various insight practices. Please see the web page "A Partial List of Insight Practices" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/A_Partial_List_of_Insight_Practices.htm for examples of each type of these insight practices.

The actual definitions of the words *meditation* and *contemplation* are reversed in Buddhism from what they mean in other religious traditions—and in what they mean based on their linguistic derivations. This is an unfortunate result of the words chosen by the first translators of Buddhist texts into English in the nineteenth century.

a The metaphor of the sword of wisdom can be traced back to the Pali canon—it appears for example in Dhp 40.

9 The Immaterial Jhānas

> *Four things which were perfectly proclaimed by the Lord . . . [include] . . . four formless states. (DN 33 1.11.7)*

FROM READING THE SUTTAS, it would appear that the Buddha considered the fourth jhāna sufficient for generating the "higher mind" of concentration deep enough to enhance your insight practice.[a] But there are also the four immaterial states, which are sometimes mentioned in the suttas as being practiced after the fourth jhāna. This sequence of eight states of concentration led in the later literature to the four immaterial states being referred to as the *arūpa jhānas*—meaning, "immaterial jhānas." The first four jhānas were then referred to as the *rūpa jhānas*—meaning, "material jhānas."

One of the understandings of the phrase "material jhānas" is that these jhānas have qualities that are possible to experience in the material world. There is a simile based on what is found in the *Visuddhimagga* for these four rūpa jhānas:

> You're lost in the desert and you don't have any water. It's a pretty precarious position. You come over a little rise and in the distance you see what might be palm trees—or it might be a mirage. You head that way and it's not changing. You start encountering people; they have wet hair, they have bundles of wet clothing; it is an oasis! You get really excited: first jhāna. You come to the oasis, it's beautiful, there's a huge pool of cool, clear water. You're so happy: second jhāna. You drink the water, you jump in, cool off, get cleaned up, get out, you are contented: third jhāna. Then you lie down in the shade of a tree and have a rest: fourth jhāna.[1]

This really does capture what it's like to move through these four states with their familiar glee, happiness, contentment, and equanimity.

The next four states—the arūpa jhānas (the immaterial jhānas)—however are

quite unlike anything we have ever experienced in this world. They each have an elaborate name rather than just a number, but there is not much detail given about these states or how to enter them. Pretty much the same terse pattern occurs again and again, although the sparse details decrease as the numbers increase. We'll now take a look at these one by one.

> Here by passing entirely beyond bodily sensations, by the disappearance of all sense of resistance and by non-attraction to the perception of diversity, seeing that space is infinite, one reaches and remains in Sphere of Infinite Space. (DN 33.1.11.7)

So the fifth jhāna, the first of the immaterial attainments, is called "the Sphere of Infinite Space." We could say "realm" or "base" or "place of infinite space" or even "the experience of infinite space." Since at the time of the Buddha, they didn't yet have the concept of zero, it is doubtful they had the concept of infinity. So perhaps a more accurate translation of the name of the fifth jhāna would be "the Realm of Limitless Space" or "the Realm of Endless Space" or "the Realm of Boundless Space."

The description starts by saying, "By passing entirely beyond bodily sensations." In the previous jhānas, you are to drench, steep, saturate, and sufuse your body. But now in order to enter the fifth jhāna, you need to pass beyond any awareness of your body. The objects of these immaterial jhānas are quite subtle, and in order to access them, you need to be very concentrated. That concentration has to be so strong that you're not paying any attention to your physical body; you are just experiencing the mental state of the jhāna.

After "passing entirely beyond bodily sensations," the description continues, "By the disappearance of all sense of resistance and by non-attraction to the perception of diversity." The best way to understand this is to examine an explanation of how to enter the fifth jhāna. When you're in the fourth jhāna, you may find yourself slumped over. Your energy is a bit low, and you should probably bring it up a bit by sitting more upright. Then what you need to do is find something that you can expand without limit. What Ayya Khema taught was to get in touch with the boundaries of your being and expand them so you fill the whole room. Once that feels stable, then expand them to fill the whole building. Once that is feeling fairly stable, then expand them to fill the neighborhood. Then expand farther and farther and farther, all the way to the horizon and beyond; just keep on with the expansion. Once you get to the horizon, let go of the perception of diversity, and then there are no more things you are expanding past. You're not expanding past the moon and then Mars and then Jupiter. Forget

all that; just simply focus on the sense of limitless expansion. This expansion needs to go smoothly; there has to be no sense of resistance. If you do encounter any resistance, you have to punch through it and keep expanding ever farther, and doing so smoothly. You just stay focused on that sense of outward expansion.

Remember in order to get to the first jhāna,

- you generate access concentration, and
- then after spending some time there,
- you find something pleasant and
- stay focused on that pleasure.

Here you are to

- imagine something you can expand,
- starting out by expanding past the things in your vicinity,
- expand farther past all objects, and
- stay focused on the sense of expansion.

If you can do so, eventually, a vast, empty space will appear before you. Don’t look for the space; if you do that, you are not focused on the expansion and thereby prevent the infinite space from appearing. You have to just focus on the expansion, and eventually the endless space will come and find you. The first jhāna was not the pleasant sensation to which you switched your attention—you needed the pīti and sukha. This expansion is not the fifth jhāna—you need to wait patiently for the infinite space to appear.

You can do as Ayya Khema taught and expand the boundaries of your being. But it turns out that it doesn’t matter what you expand. A student reported taking an imaginary balloon and blowing it up bigger and bigger and bigger, until it popped and there was the space. She was also the one who took a flashlight and followed the beam of light farther and farther and farther until it illuminated the space. Another student described riding an elevator farther and farther. People have mentioned imagining riding a rocketship farther and farther away or even listening to an actual airplane fly over and then following the sound as it went way off into the distance. It doesn’t matter what you are mentally expanding. What matters is that you can keep focused on that sense of expansion.

You don’t want to try and expand in all directions—that’s too complex. Generally, you want to at most pick two directions you can move your arms in symmetrically: out to the side along the X-axis or maybe up in front of you. Most people like to go up and out. Just stay focused on the sense of expansion.

When the space appears, it’s pretty obvious. Your reaction is likely to be something like “Oh wow, that’s a big space!” It’s as though you’re walking along in the Arizona desert and you suddenly come to the Grand Canyon; only this time there is no bottom, and there is no other side. It’s a very big space! And it’s unmistakable when it appears.

If you are a visual person, you will likely “see” the space. Sometimes it appears as off-white or light gray—there may or may not be a horizon line. Sometimes it appears as black, such as outer space—but with no perception of diversity, there are no stars or galaxies or anything like that; it’s just empty black space. If you are not a visual person, you might not “see” the space, but somehow you will know it’s there. Whether you “see” it or not, when it appears, let go of your focus on the expansion, put your full attention on the spaciousness of the space, and just sit there experiencing that. In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.14), we find that after you make the transition from the fourth jhāna to the sphere of infinite space, “one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle perception of the Sphere of Infinite Space.”[b] The object of attention is this experience of boundless space.

In this state, there is a very tiny sense of an observer that is observing this vast space before you. You won’t really notice the observer the first several times you’re in the fifth jhāna. It’s only after you have become skilled at it that you realize afterward, “Oh yes, there was a tiny observer and all that huge space before me.” When the fifth jhāna becomes really strong, the vast space is not only before you, but below and above and behind and all around, with the observer suspended in the middle. But for most people, when they first start entering the fifth jhāna, the space is only in front of them; it’s only with skill and deeper concentration that the space is all encompassing.

As for the previous jhānas, you want to learn to maintain this state for 10 to 15 minutes. So you just sit there focused on the spaciousness that is the fifth jhāna.

> By passing entirely beyond the Sphere of Infinite Space, seeing that consciousness is infinite, one reaches and remains in Sphere of Infinite Consciousness. (DN 33.1.11.7)

The instructions are getting a bit sparse. So, you’re sitting there, and you’re focused on this vast space. The trick for moving to the sixth jhāna is to shift your

attention from the space to your consciousness of the space. Become aware of your awareness; become conscious of your consciousness. It's a trick of turning your attention back on itself. Since you can't be conscious of a limitless space with a limited consciousness, when you turn your attention back to your consciousness, lo and behold, it's as big as the limitless space, and you are now aware of having a limitless consciousness. What it seems like is that initially there is the vast space before you, you turn your attention back to your consciousness, you become absorbed into the space, and you become an infinite consciousness. Now the observer and the observed are the same, although again you might not notice this when you are first learning the sixth jhāna. It feels as though your mind got very big, unlimited. Those people who describe it as having any sort of visual appearance usually describe it as dark. That's about it, other than this sense of "my mind is really big." It's an even more subtle state than the realm of infinite space.

In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.15), we find that after you make the transition from the sphere of infinite space to the sphere of infinite consciousness, "one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle perception of the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness."[c] Now your attention is on the experience of infinite consciousness.

Sometimes when the sixth jhāna is very strong, it can feel as though there are other consciousnesses within this boundless consciousness—some little consciousnesses over here, some other little consciousnesses over there. It's not like you can read the minds of these other little consciousnesses. It's just a feeling, but it only occurs when your concentration is quite strong. If it happens, there is nothing you need to do; you just notice that it seems like there are other consciousnesses within this vast, limitless consciousness. And it's only going to happen if your concentration is exceptionally strong.

If someone comes from a spiritual tradition where the goal of their spiritual practice is union with a higher self, union with *ātman* (Pali: *atta)*, and they experience the sixth jhāna, they might think they've done what needed to be done. "There's this infinite consciousness and it's me; I must now have achieved union with ātman, right?" Wrong, it's just an experience. You have put your brain/nervous system into an altered state, such that what you are experiencing is perceived by you as you having an infinite consciousness—that's all. It's certainly a very concentrated state, but it's not union with any ātman.[d] Hang out and focus on how big the consciousness is. Then the sense of this being your consciousness is very tiny; what's obvious is that you are focused on a boundless consciousness.

When you are first learning the sixth jhāna, there might not seem to be a

whole lot of difference between the fifth jhāna and the sixth. It's a subtle shift unless your concentration is really strong and you are quite familiar with the qualities of both jhānas. It's very helpful to go back and forth a few times between jhānas five and six—1-2-3-4-5-6-5-6-5-6—staying in both five and six for at least five minutes each time to let them deepen. You also want to become skilled enough that you can enter this state of infinite consciousness and remain in it for 10 to 15 minutes before moving on to learning/entering the next jhāna.

> By passing entirely beyond the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness seeing that there is no thing, one reaches and remains in the Sphere of No-Thingness. (DN 33.1.11.7)

Maurice Walshe, in his translation of the Dīgha Nikāya, used "nothingness," rather than "nothingness," which is a very good idea since it gives a more accurate description of what the jhāna experience is like. It's necessary in moving from the sixth jhāna toward the seventh to conjure up a sense of nothing. The trick is to become aware of the content of this infinite consciousness. The sense of space is long gone, and you realize the consciousness is not conscious of anything. It is conscious of nothing, *no-thing*. Put your attention on that sense of no-thing. The nothing, at first, may be a small nothing, sort of a basketball-sized nothing in front of your face. Then as you stay with it, you realize there's nothing over here and nothing over there and nothing back there or anywhere. Then the nothing seems to be bigger, although it never really gets that infinite feel that you have in the fifth jhāna of the realm of infinite space, or the sixth jhāna of the realm of infinite consciousness. It just sort of goes from a little nothing to a big nothing to an even bigger nothing.

It's like if you go down into the basement, turn on the light switch, and it doesn't work. You peer into the darkness trying to determine what's in the basement. You can see faintly there is nothing right in front of you. As your eyes get a little more adjusted, you see there is nothing over here and there's nothing over there—why, there is nothing down here at all! It's that kind of nothing.

Look around the room you are currently in—most likely the room has a bunch of stuff in it. Suppose the next time you are gone from this room for an extended time, someone comes in and takes everything away. When you next return, there's nothing here. The seventh jhāna is that kind of nothing.

This no-thingness is not the emptiness that is talked about so often in Mahayana tradition; that's a very different concept—it refers to things being empty of any inherent existence, and recognition of it occurs in more of an insight state than a concentration state. The no-thingness of the seventh jhāna is

like you take the lid off the cookie jar and there is nothing in there. It is not the emptiness that is being referred to; it's the fact that there is no thing to perceive. Put your attention on the no-thingness. In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.16), we find that after you make the transition from the sphere of infinite consciousness to the sphere of no-thingness, "one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle perception of the Sphere of No-Thingness."

The no-thingness can manifest visually in two different ways, though of course it doesn't have to manifest visually, especially if you are not a visual person. The most common way it manifests is as blackness or deep purple or dark blue—much like if you were peering into a room with no windows and no lights. There is a sense of space there, but what really gets your attention is not the space but the overwhelming sense that there is nothing at all to be found in that space. In the fifth jhāna, there is *a big space* with nothing in it; in the seventh jhāna, there is *nothing* as far into the space as you can sense.

The best way to get a sense of the other visual way the seventh jhāna can manifest would be to remember how on an old TV if you turned to a channel with no station, you got black-and-white static. Some people see something somewhat like that in the seventh jhāna, only it's black-and-black static.

There is a tiny sense of an observer suspended in the nothing. First, perhaps, there is only nothing in front of you, but as the jhāna gets more refined and you get deeper into it, there is nothing beside you or below you or behind you or above you. The sense of an observer is really tiny, much smaller than in the fifth jhāna, but still on reflection afterward, you know there was a tiny point of observation suspended in the middle of nothing.

Sometimes, people stumble into this state by accident. They're usually on very long retreat and are just meditating away, doing their vipassanā practice, for example, and suddenly they fall into the void. It's pretty terrifying, because to go from ordinary consciousness into the seventh jhāna, you have to be extremely concentrated. With that much concentration, the experience is going to be really intense. I have had students come to an interview and ask, "Can I tell you about something that happened? I was sitting in a long retreat and was just meditating, and I fell into the void." I ask them what happened next, and they usually say, "I went running to the teachers, and they told me to go take a shower, get something to eat, and get calmed down, get grounded." I ask them to describe "the void," and after they do so, I say, "It sounds to me like the seventh jhāna. I'm not sure. I guess we won't really know until you get back there." They usually say, "I don't know if I want to go back there. It was really scary!" But, eventually they learn the first six jhānas and come once more for an interview. I give them the instructions for the seventh jhāna, and they say, "I don't know if I

want to go back there." I say, "It'll be fine; just go try it." So they follow the instructions and come back and say, "Yes, yes, that's exactly where I was! Only this time it wasn't scary." The fear that arose was fear of the unknown—they didn't know what was happening to them. But there is nothing frightening about the seventh jhāna in and of itself. There is nothing there, so there is nothing to be frightened of. It's actually a pretty cool place to hang out. There's nothing to disturb you.

Again you want to become skilled enough that you can enter this state and remain in it for 10 to 15 minutes before moving on.

> By passing entirely beyond the Sphere of No-Thingness, one reaches and remains in the Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception. (DN 33.1.11.7)

There is not much in the way of instructions or even description of the sphere of neither perception nor nonperception. "Perception" is a translation of the Pali word *saññā. Saññā* often refers to your capacity to label things, to identify them, to look them up in your database of objects and give them a name. Look around your current environment, and what do you notice? If you start naming what you notice, that's saññā. Saññā is perception, identifying, naming; so the eighth jhāna is the state of neither identifying nor not identifying, neither naming nor not naming.[e]

This state is hard to describe because it's a state that has no characteristics that you can use to identify it, other than the fact that it's a state that has no characteristics you can use to identify it. But there is good news. If you have a good, solid seventh jhāna—a good, solid nothing—let it collapse and come to rest in front of your face. Then see if your mind will go into a state that has no characteristics (and yet, you can stay in that state). It's very hard to describe, but it is fairly easy to find if you have sufficient concentration.

The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9) does not mention the realm of neither perception nor nonperception, so there is no description of the object of the eighth jhāna. And in fact, it is very difficult to put into words just exactly what the object is—other than the object is the experience that has no characteristics that you can use to identify it. Like the fourth jhāna, it is a very restful state; sometimes it feels almost like you could just lean your head against it and rest, although, of course, there is not anything to lean your head against.

The realm of neither perception nor nonperception is far more subtle than the previous jhānas, and that makes it far more difficult to sustain than previous ones. In each of the jhānas, there is the object of your attention—for example,

the contentment in the third jhāna—and your one-pointed attention on that object. The depth of any jhāna is not based on how strong the object is, but rather on how unlikely you are to become distracted from that object. In any jhāna, it is possible to wobble if your concentration is not strong enough—to be fully with the object for a time and then to begin to slip off into distraction, thinking. If you catch yourself soon enough, you can quickly return to the object of that jhāna and then restabilize the jhāna. The contentment, for example, does not immediately disappear the instant you become distracted; rather it fades out over a period of a few seconds to a few minutes. What is happening is that you are in the jhāna, lose it for a short time, and then regain the jhāna. Of course this wobbling is not nearly as useful as never being distracted from the object of the jhāna, but given the depth of your concentration—or lack thereof—this sort of wobbling might be happening. This wobbling can even happen with the seventh jhāna, although there you have a much shorter time to be "gone" before the sense of nothingness disappears entirely.

However with the eighth jhāna, you might have time for one brief sentence—not containing the words *I, me,* or *mine*—before it completely disappears. It's a very subtle state and disappears quite quickly if you lose your attention on it. This makes it far more fragile than any of the previous jhānas. If you do successfully learn to enter the realm of neither perception nor nonperception and then become distracted and find no trace of the jhāna to return to when you recognize the distraction, it will then be necessary to go back to the seventh or perhaps even to the fifth and work your way back to the eighth jhāna.

Once you have learned all eight jhānas, it is a good idea to practice 1-2-3-4-5-6-5-6-7-6-7-8-7-8-7-6-7-6-5, going back and forth, up and down among the four immaterial jhānas. It is also good to practice 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1. These four immaterial jhānas will deepen your concentration so that you have a mind that is even more concentrated, purer, brighter, more malleable, wieldier, steadier, and more imperturbable. This will enhance your insight practice by enabling you to have an even less egocentric viewpoint and maintain it for an even longer period of time.

For more information about these immaterial jhānas, see the chapter in Part Two entitled "The Immaterial States."

Possible Problems Associated with Learning the Immaterial Jhānas

The most common problem encountered in learning the fifth jhāna is not having strong enough concentration. The transition from the fourth jhāna to the fifth is the most difficult one for most people. You are exiting a state where there is still enough sense of your physical body that you can "sit suffusing [your] body with a pure bright mind," but in order to enter the realm of infinite space, you have to "pass entirely beyond bodily sensations." In order to make the transition, you are going to need a nice, strong experience of the fourth jhāna. As mentioned earlier, if the fourth jhāna is not feeling strongly concentrated, it might be useful to go back to the third jhāna and then return to the fourth after letting the third jhāna deepen for multiple minutes. And of course, the best remedy when encountering concentration that is not strong enough in any situation is to spend more time in access concentration before initially entering the jhānas.

Another very common problem is impatience. You might spend several minutes trying to stay focused on the sense of outward expansion but become tempted to "look for" the infinite space. That won't work—doing so means you are losing your focus on the outward expansion. It really does require that you just sit back, relax, and stay with the expansion. Don't worry; when you do arrive in the fifth jhāna, you will unmistakably recognize it.

Occasionally students report feeling like there is something in front of them that is impeding the expansion. If this occurs, switch to expanding directly into whatever it is that is impeding you, and push it farther and farther away. Sometimes this is all that is necessary to complete the transition to the fifth jhāna; otherwise, when it has been pushed so far away that it no longer feels like it is impeding in any way, you can either resume expanding as before or just continue expanding in the direction you pushed it away.

If the expansion fails to take you into the realm of infinite space after about five minutes, let go of expanding and drop back "down" into the fourth jhāna. Assuming there is still plenty of time left in your meditation session, you can let the fourth deepen and then try once again.

A problem common to all the immaterial jhānas is that all four objects of attention are very subtle. If your concentration is not strong enough, you might indeed be able to enter one of them but not be able to sustain it. If you find your mind wobbling, drop back to the previous jhāna, reestablish it firmly, stay longer in it than you did previously, and then try reentering that jhāna.

Sometimes the shift from the infinite space to your consciousness of the infinite space is difficult to do, or it even may be unclear as to what to do. It's a good idea to become familiar with making this shift with far less subtle objects: stare at some object in your room for ten seconds or so; then see if you can become aware of your awareness of that object. Practice this until the shift is

clear, and it can make it much easier to shift from the fifth to the sixth jhāna.

Occasionally when a student is attempting to move from the fifth to the sixth jhāna, they wind up skipping the sixth jhāna and enter the seventh jhāna of no-thingness. This is usually triggered by putting more attention on the fact that the infinite space has nothing in it, rather than putting your attention on your awareness of the space. If this happens, it's good to remain in the seventh jhāna for a few minutes and then drop back into the fifth jhāna. Again it might be necessary to expand something to reestablish the fifth, but it usually is fairly easy to reenter. Then remain for several minutes in the infinite space, and try once again shifting your attention to your consciousness of the space.

Because the realm of neither perception nor nonperception is far more subtle than any of the other jhānas, you are going to need to be quite skilled at the realm of no-thingness in order to find it. It is very important to spend a longer than usual time in the seventh jhāna before trying to move on to the eighth. When you feel like the seventh is very firmly established and are certain you've been in it long enough, stay in a little longer before letting the no-thingness collapse.

Although I stated earlier that you should "begin doing your insight practice from the highest jhāna you know," the eighth jhāna is not all that well suited for doing an insight practice that requires thinking, for example contemplating the five daily remembrances or dependent origination. If you are going to be doing a contemplation for your insight practice and you have attained the eighth jhāna, it might be better to go backward to the seventh jhāna, stabilize it, and then begin your contemplation. But if you are going to be doing an insight practice that is more meditative, such as a body scan or noticing vedanā, the eighth jhāna is a suitable jumping off place.

a Not only does the insight step occur after the fourth jhāna in the gradual training, the phrase "gains at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four jhānas that constitute the higher mind" occurs at MN 6.9, MN 53 (passim), MN 108.17, and MN 119.36

b This statement is left out of Walshe's translation of Dīgha Nikāya 9, but it does appear in the Pali at D 1.183. Thanissaro Bhikkhu translates the full passage at www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.09.0.than.html.

c Again this statement is left out of Walshe's translation of Dīgha Nikāya 9, but it does appear in the Pali at D 1.184. Thanissaro Bhikkhu translates the full passage at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.09.0.than.html.

d Of course the Buddha's teaching of anatta—"no*ātman*"—denies the existence of any ātman with which to experience union.

e *Saññā* can also mean “consciousness”; hence the eighth jhāna could also be translated as “neither consciousness nor unconsciousness.” See chapter 18, “The Immaterial States,” for further discussion.

10 With a Mind Thus Concentrated

> *Here, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna . . . the second jhāna . . . the third jhāna . . . the fourth jhāna. This is called the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, and that it should not be feared. (MN 139.9)*

THE JHĀNAS and the immaterial states seem to be naturally occurring states of mind. Approximately 10 percent of the students I've worked with report having experienced one (and sometimes more) jhānas as a child.[a] Occasionally they tell me this based on my description of the jhānas; more often they report this after learning to enter a jhāna, noticing how familiar the state seems, and then remembering having entered that state as a child.

Far more students report having experienced one or more of these states while on a previous meditation retreat. These are not superhuman mind states—they arise naturally when your mind is sufficiently concentrated and you turn it toward a thought or feeling that is close enough to the experience of a jhāna. In chaos theory there is the notion of an *attractor*. An attractor represents a state into which a system finally settles. If we start with different initial conditions for the system, under certain circumstances, we find the same pattern emerging. The circumstances for which this holds true is called the *basin of attraction* for the attractor. It seems as though the jhānas are attractors; if your mental system gets close enough to one of the attractors—that is, you have sufficient concentration plus some other mental factor(s), such as pleasure or joy or contentment or the notion of vast space—you are in the basin of attraction for that jhāna and settle into the pattern that we call the jhāna.

In ornithology there is the notion of a *search image. Search image* is defined

by Luuk Tinbergen[1] as a typical image of a prey that a predator can remember and use to spot prey when that image is common. In a natural foraging situation, a bird's most effective strategy is to maximize its food intake while minimizing energy expenditure.[2] Use of a search image enables a bird of prey to quickly "sort" visual input into that which can be ignored and that which should be pursued. The descriptions of the jhānas given above are search images. Do not take them as absolutes; use them as a generalized description of the states you are seeking when your concentration is excellent. This will maximize your chances of finding these states as they manifest for you while minimizing your mental energy expenditure.

The jhānas were not invented; they were discovered. People in India had been practicing mindfulness of breathing for many centuries by the time of the Buddha. They had been stumbling into deep, stable states of concentration for a very long time. Eventually these states were codified and arranged in order of increasing subtlety of object. By the fifth century b.c.e., these were well known and were being taught—Master Gotama learned them from his two teachers before he became the Buddha.

Although the principle is not mentioned explicitly in the suttas, the depths of these jhānic experiences are dependent on the depth of concentration. It seems there are two ways to increase the depth of the jhānas: stay longer in access concentration and stay longer in the jhānas that precede the jhāna you wish to deepen. Since the meditation objects used in access concentration are less subtle than the objects of the jhānas, it is often more useful to remain in access concentration a longer time if one wishes to experience deep jhānas.

It almost seems like the jhānas are a multiplier—whatever depth of concentration you bring to your initial jhānic experience can be doubled or tripled by moving through the jhānas. For example (using numbers completely pulled out of thin air), suppose moving from the first to fourth jhāna doubles your concentration and moving on to the eighth jhāna doubles that again. Then if you enter the first jhāna with 3 units of concentration, moving to the fourth will give you 6 units and moving on to the eighth will give you 12 units. But if you enter the first jhāna with 20 units of concentration, moving to the fourth yields 40 units and moving on to the eighth yields 80 units of concentration. Remember all these numbers are *bogus;* but hopefully the above gives you a sense of what the jhānas can do for your concentration.

It is also important to remember that the jhānas are not a big deal—they are a useful deal, but people should never laud or disparage themselves because they can or cannot enter a jhāna. In the Sappurisa Sutta (MN 113.21), the Buddha says:

> But a true man considers thus: “Non-identification even with the attainment of the first jhāna has been declared by the Blessed One; for in whatever way they conceive, the fact is ever other than that.” So, putting non-identification first, he neither lauds himself nor disparages others because of his attainment of the first jhāna. This too is the character of a true man.

The Buddha then goes on to repeat this for all eight jhānas. The jhānas are useful for people who can enter them and use them wisely. But people have all sorts of talents. Some people have talents that make jhāna practice doable, and others have different talents. Basically if you do have talents that enable you to learn the jhānas, then you should use those talents on the spiritual path. If you don’t have those talents, use the ones you have.

At times I have been accused of teaching “Jhāna Lite.” It’s certainly true that what I am teaching is “lite” compared to what is described in the *Visuddhimagga*, but as you’ll see in Part Two of this book, what is described in the *Visuddhimagga* doesn’t match what is described in the suttas. Certainly the experience of students first learning the jhānas on a ten-day meditation course is going to be lighter than what is possible on a longer retreat after they have developed skill in these states. And what students initially learn on a ten-day retreat is going to be “lite” compared to what is described in the suttas. But there are three very important advantages to learning these so-called lite jhānas:

- They can be learned by a significant percentage of people who have a good daily meditation practice at the time they begin the attempt to learn them.
- The jhānas learned on a ten-day meditation retreat can be used very fruitfully to enhance insight practice to a remarkable degree.
- By staying longer in access concentration, the depth of these so-called lite jhānas can be strengthened so that they do closely match the descriptions given in the suttas.

The Buddha was one of the most practical people who ever lived. He wasn’t interested in answering metaphysical questions, such as how the world began. He just wanted people to practice as best they could, given their life circumstances, so that they could reduce or even eliminate their dukkha. From a practical standpoint, it is far better to engage in a practice you can actually do than to hold out trying to learn some practice that is beyond your capacity given

your current circumstances. Since most people reading this book are not living a lifestyle that is conducive to generating on a daily basis the really deep concentration that can arise on a retreat of a month or longer, it seems to be much better to teach in a way that allows a student to work with the concentration that is available to them and use that to enhance their practice. Even if the jhānas you learn are "Jhāna Lite," they have the capacity to recharge your meditation practice; they provide a very wholesome source of pleasure—something the Buddha felt was necessary on the spiritual path; and they can enhance your insight meditation practice strongly enough so that you gain life-changing insights.

a In MN 36.31, the Buddha recounts remembering a childhood experience of the first jhāna.

PART TWO

Demystified Jhānas

Introduction to Part Two

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE JHĀNAS presented in Part One of this book is not an orthodox understanding of the jhānas. The orthodox Theravadan understanding of jhānas is based on the *Visuddhimagga*, which was written more than eight centuries after the death of the Buddha and describes extremely deep states of concentration. The orthodox Tibetan understanding of jhānas also describes states of extremely deep concentration. It is highly unlikely the Tibetan view was derived from the Theravadan view or vice versa. It is far more likely both understandings were derived from a common source that existed in ancient India before the saṅgha divided into the various Sthaviravāda and Mahayana sects, the latter of which later spread to Tibet. Both schools claim that common source was the Buddha. I'm claiming otherwise.

As I learned from Ajahn Buddhadasa, if you are going to write something that is different from what the orthodox teachings are, you better back it up with impeccable sutta scholarship. So this second part of the book is that sutta scholarship. It contains a detailed examination of what can be found in the suttas regarding the jhānas. This examination shows that the orthodox views of the jhānas conflict with what the suttas actually describe and, furthermore, shows that the practices described in Part One are in accord with the suttas.

11 Vitakka and Vicāra

One enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by vitakka and vicāra. (DN 2.77)

KEY PALI WORDS:

vitakka thinking
vicāra examining

PERHAPS NO ASPECT OF THE FIRST JHĀNA as described in the suttas is more misunderstood than the words *vitakka* and *vicāra. They* are often translated as something like "initial and sustained thinking" or "initial and sustained application" or "initial and sustained attention on the meditation object." It is true that this is the meaning of these words in later Buddhism, particularly in the commentaries, but this is definitely not the meaning in the suttas—ever. At the time of the Buddha and probably for more than a century after his death, *vitakka* meant "thinking," and *vicāra* meant "examining" or "pondering" or "evaluating" or "considering."

The combination "vitakka and vicāra" is a case *of synonymous parallelism*, a rhetorical device, which occurs very frequently in the suttas. Just like the phrase "One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with this rapture and happiness" does not indicate four different things to do, the phrase "vitakka and vicāra" does not indicate two different qualities/factors/aspects. The use of "vitakka and vicāra" is just stressing that thinking is indeed happening in the first jhāna and totally goes away in the second jhāna.[1]

There is a very interesting note under the definition of *vitakka* in the Pali Text

Society's dictionary:

> Looking at the combination vitakka+vicāra in earlier and later works one comes to the conclusion that they were once used to denote one & the same thing: just thought, thinking, only in an emphatic way (as they are also semantically synonymous), and that one has to take them as one expression, . . . without being able to state their difference. With the advance in the Saṅgha of intensive study of terminology they became distinguished mutually. Vitakka became the inception of mind, or attending, and was no longer applied, as in the Suttas, to thinking in general.

Footnote 611 in Maurice Walshe's translation of the Dīgha Nikāya reads:

> Vitakka-vicāra. . . . I have used the rendering mentioned at n.80 ['thinking and pondering'], instead of the more usual 'initial and sustained application'. In a private communication, L. S. Cousins writes: 'The words simply do not mean this . . . Suttanta does not distinguish between access and absorption—hence the terms used do not have their momentary Abhidhamma sense. In the case of vicāra this is not even the Abhidhamma sense, since the Dhammasaṅgaṇī [a] clearly explains vicāra as "investigating" .'

Vitakka is a much more commonly occurring word in the suttas than *vicāra*—in fact, in the PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* by T. W. Rhys Davids under *vicāra* we find:

> Hardly ever by itself (as at Th 1, 1117 manovicāra), usually in close connection or direct combination with vitakka.

Footnote 436 in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the numerical discourses mentions that "vicāra originally meant 'traveling around.'"[2] This certainly gives much more of a sense of "examining" or "pondering" or "turning over in the mind" and really seems to be the opposite of "sustained attention."

Vitakka occurs in the titles of a pair of suttas:

- Majjhima Nikāya 19—Dvedhāvitakka Sutta
- Majjhima Nikāya 20—Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta

and these are very definitely all about thinking and contain nothing about initial application or initial attention.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya at SN 21.1, Mahāmoggallāna reports about when he was first learning the jhānas and wondered:

> "What now is noble silence?"
>
> Then, friends, it occurred to me: "Here, with the subsiding of thinking and examining, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which has inner tranquility and unification of mind, is without thinking and examining, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration. This is called noble silence."

In SN 41.6, Citta (the householder) asks Venerable Kāmabhū, "What is the verbal formation?" He is told, "Thinking and examining are the verbal formation." Citta then asks, "Why are thinking and examining the verbal formation?" He is told, "First one thinks and examines, then afterwards one breaks into speech; that is why thinking and examining are the verbal formation."

These two suttas clearly show that *vitakka* and *vicāra* do indeed refer to thinking. And since the first one at SN 21.1 is in reference to the second jhāna, there is no way *vitakka* and *vicāra* can mean anything like "initial and sustained attention/application" in the context of the jhānas in the suttas.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya at SN 40.2, we find a passage that is parallel to what occurs in SN 21.1, mentioned above, and again Mahāmoggallāna reports about when he was first learning the jhānas:

> "Then, friends, with the subsiding of thinking and examining, I entered and dwelt in the second jhāna. . . . While I dwelt therein perception and attention accompanied by thinking and examining assailed me.
>
> "Then, friends, the Blessed One came to me by means of spiritual power and said this: 'Moggallāna, Moggallāna, do not be negligent, brahmin, regarding the second jhāna. Steady your mind in the second jhāna, unify your mind in the second jhāna, concentrate your mind in the second jhāna.' Then, on a later occasion, with the subsiding of thinking and examining, I entered and dwelt in the second jhāna, which has inner tranquility and unification of mind, is without thought and examination, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration."

Here we see thinking—vitakka and vicāra—arising to disturb Mahā-

moggallāna's second jhāna.

Now, it's true that quite likely the whole Moggallāna Saṃyutta (SN 40) is a late composition since "virtually the entire Moggallāna Saṃyutta" is missing from the Chinese āgamas,[3] but this just further points to the fact that for a very long time after the death of the Buddha, *vitakka* and *vicāra* never meant anything like "initial and sustained application" or "initial and sustained attention on the meditation object."

In fact, even the translation of *vitakka* and *vicāra* as "thinking and examining" does not really accurately capture the meaning the phrase "vitakka and vicāra" has in relation to the jhānas. Remember above, Rhys Davids indicates that in the suttas, they are "used to denote one & the same thing: just thought, thinking, only in an emphatic way." Perhaps the best translation of the sutta description of the first jhāna would be

> Quite secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, one enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by *thinking and more thinking* and filled with the rapture and happiness born of seclusion. (DN 2.77; emphasis mine)

Equally the sutta description of the second jhāna is actually emphasizing, by mentioning it twice, that the thinking that occurred in the first jhāna has ceased; the description could more accurately be translated as

> Further, with the subsiding *of all thinking*, one enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which is accompanied by inner tranquility and unification of mind and is without *any thinking* and is filled with rapture and happiness, born of concentration. (DN 2.79; emphasis mine)

This does not mean that initial application to the meditation object and sustained application to the meditation object are not a part of the first jhāna. Not only are they an important part of the first jhāna, they are equally important when beginning to meditate in order to generate access concentration. You must initially apply your attention to the meditation object, and in order to generate access concentration, you must sustain your attention on the meditation object. Then to move toward the first jhāna, you must initially find a pleasant sensation and apply your attention to it, and then you sustain your attention on that pleasant sensation until the pīti and sukha arise. Once the pīti and sukha arise, you once again apply and sustain your attention, this time on the pīti-sukha experience.

For the second and higher jhānas, the usual argument from those who understand *vitakka and vicāra* as "initial and sustained application" is that the "unification of mind" that arises in the second jhāna takes over from having to "apply" your attention—your focus becomes automatic, and thus there is no more vitakka and vicāra in the second and higher jhānas. All this is true—but it misses the important point that there is still thinking in the first jhāna, and the subsiding of that thinking is what generates the second jhāna.

If we want to understand what the suttas are saying about the jhānas, it is indeed necessary to understand what the words used actually meant at the time the suttas were composed. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* just mean "thinking," both in the context of the jhānas and throughout the suttas.[4] Understanding this provides a much clearer picture of what the suttas are describing for the first jhāna, as we will see in the next chapter.

a The *Dhammasaṅganī* (Enumeration of phenomena) is one of the books of the Pali Abhidhamma. However, in its description of the first jhāna, *vicāra* does seem to imply "sustained attention" since ekaggata (one-pointedness) has been added as a factor of the first jhāna. See the web page "Abhidhamma Jhānas" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Abhidhamma_Jhanas.htm for more information.

12 First Jhāna

> *Quite secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, one enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by vitakka and vicāra and filled with pīti and sukha born of seclusion. One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with this pīti and sukha born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one's entire body which is not suffused by this pīti and sukha. (DN 2.77)*

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
vitakka	thinking
vicāra	examining
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy

"The first jhāna has five factors." The amount of misinformation in that statement is appalling. Those who make such a statement list the following as the five factors:

- vitakka,
- vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha,
- ekaggata.

A cursory examination of the sutta description of the first jhāna uncovers nothing that could correspond to ekaggata—which means “one-pointedness.” When this is pointed out, the usual reply is something like, “It’s assumed.” Why would it be assumed? An in-depth examination of the sutta description of the first jhāna precludes any possibility of ekaggata being part of the first jhāna—it is simply impossible to have one-pointedness while thinking! The sutta understanding of vitakka and vicāra, explained in the previous chapter, clearly indicates that the first jhāna was not understood as a state of one-pointed absorption.

So how did ekaggata come to be associated with the first jhāna when the description of the first jhāna undeniably precludes such a thing? It appears that, over time, the understanding of what the experience of the first jhāna was changed. Apparently during succeeding generations after the death of the Buddha, the monks[a] found ways to enter into deeper and deeper meditative states until they reached full absorption, probably long before the *Visuddhimagga* and other commentaries were written, which explicitly describe the first jhāna as an absorption state.

The descriptions of the jhānas found in the Abhidhamma (composed approximately a couple of centuries after the Buddha’s death) are different from what is found in the suttas, and that change is consistent with an understanding of the jhānas as more deeply concentrated states.[b] By the time of the *Visuddhimagga* (composed more than eight centuries after the Buddha’s death), the first jhāna had come to be understood as a state of full absorption, where not only is thinking not possible, but even hearing and noticing one’s body are precluded.[1]

This move toward understanding the first jhāna as a deeper state of concentration is actually hinted at in two passages in a pair of very late suttas. In the Mahāvedalla Sutta (MN 43), we find:

> 18. “Friend, what is the first jhāna?”
>
> “Here, friend, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by vitakka and vicarā, with pīti and sukha born of seclusion. This is called the first jhāna.”

Notice that there are only the usual four “factors” given; there is no mention of *ekaggata* (or *citt’ekaggata*). However, MN 43 is inconsistent—in the next

verse, we find:

> 19. “Friend, how many factors does the first jhāna have?”
>
> “Friend, the first jhāna has five factors. Here, when a bhikkhu has entered upon the first jhāna, there occur vitakka, vicarā, pīti, sukha, and citt’ekaggata [one-pointedness of mind]. That is how the first jhāna has five factors.”

MN 43 is a “catechism” sutta composed almost entirely of questions and answers. Suttas of this type seem to have been composed long after the Buddha’s death when such rote learning was deemed useful for teaching newly ordained monks. This sutta seems to have been composed around the time of the transition from composing suttas to composing the Abhidhamma—it is full of categories and lists. It’s not so “late” that there is not a corresponding Chinese āgama;[2] however, in that corresponding āgama, verse 19 is missing. This would imply that verse 19 is a later addition to a late sutta, and the insertion was made without dealing with the inconsistency between verses 18 and 19.[3] This sutta is certainly not a reliable source of information for understanding the jhānas in the bulk of the suttas.

The other place where *ekaggata* is mentioned as a jhāna “factor” comes from the Anupada Sutta (MN 111). Once again we are dealing with a late sutta[c] that also includes a contradiction:

> 3. “Here, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by vitakka and vicarā, with pīti and sukha born of seclusion.
>
> 4. “And the states in the first jhāna—the vitakka, vicāra, with pīti, sukha, and citt’ekaggata [one-pointedness of mind]; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.

In verse 3, the standard sutta description of the first jhāna is given—which has no mention of *citt’ekaggata. Then* in verse 4, the sutta says that citt’ekaggata is defined and known along with a host of additional factors. These additional factors come to prominence in the Abhidhamma. Caroline Rhys Davids points

out that this sutta's style is similar to that of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, regarded as one of the earliest books of the Abhidhamma.[4] [d] Once again we have a sutta that is certainly not a reliable source of information for understanding the jhānas found in the bulk of the suttas.

So does this mean that the first jhāna as described in the suttas has four factors:

- vitakka,
- vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha?

What about the mention in the description of the first jhāna of being "secluded from sense pleasures" and "secluded from unwholesome states"? Aren't these actually an important part of generating the first jhāna, especially since pīti and sukha are said to be born of seclusion? Should the first jhāna actually have six factors:

- seclusion from sense pleasures,
- seclusion from unwholesome states,
- vitakka,
- vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha?

But in the chapter "Vitakka and Vicāra," we saw that really vitakka and vicāra are not two distinct things in the sutta description of the first jhāna; they are mentioned as a way of emphasizing that thinking is present. So maybe we are back to five factors:

- seclusion from sense pleasures,
- seclusion from unwholesome states,
- vitakka and vicāra,
- pīti,

- sukha?

But really it's the seclusion itself that is important, not the two things mentioned to be secluded from.[e] So maybe we are back again to four factors:

- seclusion,
- vitakka and vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha?

But what does it really mean to be a factor of something? The dictionary definition of *factor* is "something that actively contributes to an accomplishment, result, or process."[f] Does thinking actually contribute to the experiencing of the first jhāna—or isn't the thinking really just a defect in concentration that doesn't detract from the first jhāna? It seems weird to include a noncontributing defect as a factor! So does this mean the first jhāna only has three factors:

- seclusion,
- pīti,
- sukha?

And what about initial and sustained application/attention to the pīti and sukha? Now we know that *vitakka* and *vicāra* refer to thinking—so how do we factor in the initial and sustained application/attention that are required to enter and remain in the jhāna?

It seems that the whole idea of "factors of the first jhāna" is simply not a useful concept. In fact "jhāna factors" in general is not a concept found in the suttas except in the two above-mentioned late and internally contradictory suttas. And the Pali word *aṅga*, which is translated as "factor" and is used in many places in the suttas, only appears in relation to the jhānas in one place—MN 43.19 (mentioned above).

If we really want to understand what the Buddha was experiencing and teaching for the first jhāna, it's probably better to ignore the word "factor" completely and simply talk about the *qualities mentioned* for the first jhāna, which are four:

- seclusion,
- vitakka and vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha.

And it is important to remember that this is not a complete list—initial and sustained application/attention to the pīti and sukha are not mentioned in the standard sutta description. However, in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.10), we do find the following after the standard first jhāna description: "Having reached the first jhāna, one remains in it. . . . At that time there is present a true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of seclusion, and one becomes one who is conscious of this pīti and sukha." (DN 9.10)

If we really want to list the qualities of the first jhāna we could have

- seclusion,
- vitakka and vicāra,
- pīti,
- sukha,
- consciousness of pīti and sukha.

The standard description of the first jhāna goes on to say that once the pīti and sukha are established, they should be spread throughout your body. Again we have textual evidence that the later understanding expressed in the commentaries is simply wrong. As mentioned above, the commentaries describe the first jhāna as having concentration so deep as to generate a state of complete absorption[5]—one where you don't hear sounds or experience any tactile sensations or even are aware of the passage of time. But if there is no body awareness at all, how on earth could you "drench, steep, saturate, and suffuse your body with this pīti and sukha born of seclusion, so that there is no part of your entire body which is not

suffused by this pīti and sukha”?

Now, the usual retort from those who understand jhānas based on the commentaries is to point out that the word translated as “body” is *kāya*, which means “group, heap, collection,” rather than *rūpa*, which means “materiality.” Hence, they say, in English we should read something like “being,” and it refers to one’s mental being. There is some truth to this in that *kāya* could include one’s mental being. But the passage on insight knowledge, which often follows the description of the fourth jhāna, makes it very clear from the context there that *kāya* is being used to refer to the physical body.[8] The heart of the matter is that the all-pervasive pīti and sukha should be completely encompassing, both mentally and physically. It’s quite clear from the sutta description of the first jhāna that not only is its concentration level not deep enough to shut off all thinking, but it also is not deep enough to block tactile awareness.

A final defense of the first jhāna being a state of complete absorption is made by those who favor the interpretation of the jhānas found in the commentaries by quoting from Anguttara-Nikāya 10.72 (Kaṇṭaka Sutta): “Noise is a thorn to the first jhāna.” This is interpreted to mean that you can’t hear anything when properly in the first jhāna. But take a look at the complete list of ten thorns:

> (1) Delight in company is a thorn to one who delights in solitude. (2) Pursuit of an attractive object is a thorn to one intent on meditation on the mark of the unattractive. (3) An unsuitable show is a thorn to one guarding the doors of the sense faculties. (4) Keeping company with women is a thorn to the celibate life. (5) Noise is a thorn to the first jhāna. (6) Thinking and examining are a thorn to the second jhāna. (7) Rapture is a thorn to the third jhāna. (8) In-and-out breathing is a thorn to the fourth jhāna. (9) Perception and feeling are a thorn to the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling. (10) Lust is a thorn, hatred is a thorn, and delusion is a thorn.

Each thorn is something that, if attention is given to it, makes it difficult—even impossible—to do something you intend to do. Far from confirming that you don’t hear in the first jhāna, it simply confirms the obvious that trying to meditate in a noisy environment is unlikely to lead to concentration deep enough to enter or to sustain the first jhāna.

In summary, what the sutta description of the first jhāna is saying is the following: Become secluded from the hindrances. Don’t worry if there is still some background thinking. Pīti and sukha will be generated via the pāmojja (worldly joy) that arises from being secluded from the hindrances. Focus on the

pīti and sukha; sustaining them enables you to remain in the first jhāna. Spread the pīti and sukha throughout your body.

a Most likely the nuns were deepening their concentration in the jhānas as well, but since it was monks who wound up composing the later Buddhist literature, I say *monks* rather than *monastics*.
b The Abhidhamma does state that ekaggata is part of *every* mind state—one of the universal cetasikas. This could be the source of this misunderstanding of the sutta description of the first jhāna, but that would be very hard, probably impossible, to determine.
c See the web page "MN 111" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/MN_111.htm for a detailed discussion of the Anupada Sutta and why it is considered late and unreliable.
d See the web page "Abhidhamma Jhānas" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Abhidhamma_Jhanas.htm for more information on the view of the jhānas found in the *Dhammasaṅganī*.
e As mentioned in the chapters "Access Concentration" and "First Jhāna," this "seclusion" refers to being secluded from the hindrances.
f The Pali word being translated as "factor" is *aṅga* meaning "a constituent part of a whole or system or collection" or "a constituent part as characteristic, prominent or distinguishing, a mark, attribute, sign, quality" according to the Pali Text Society's dictionary. "Factor" indeed has the same meaning.
g See chapter 17, "Insight Knowledge," for a more detailed discussion of *kāya* as "body."

13 Second Jhāna

> *Further, with the subsiding of vitakka and vicāra, one enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which is accompanied by inner tranquility and unification of mind and is without vitakka and vicāra and is filled with pīti and sukha born of concentration. One drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one's body with the pīti and sukha born of concentration, so that there is no part of one's entire body not suffused by this pīti and sukha. (DN 2.79)*

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
vitakka	thinking
vicāra	examining
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy

In the sutta description of the jhānas, the point of demarcation between the first and second jhānas occurs when the vitakka and vicāra—the thinking—fully subsides. If you've been paying attention, you might feel this contradicts what I wrote earlier in the chapter on the second jhāna, where I seemed to indicate that the point of demarcation between the first and second jhānas occurs with the foreground-background shift between pīti and sukha. What's going on here? The answer is that what I wrote in the chapter on the second jhāna is for pedagogical purposes.

If we carefully read the suttas' description of the second jhāna, it indicates that

three things need to happen:

- the subsiding of vitakka and vicāra,
- [gaining] inner tranquility,
- [gaining] unification of mind.

Now, indeed it is possible to have all three of these occur simultaneously, but if you are trying to learn to move intentionally between the first and second jhāna, this is quite a challenge. So with the instruction to make the foreground-background shift between pīti and sukha by taking a deep breath, you initially work on generating some degree of inner tranquility. Obviously, once the vitakka and vicāra subside completely, the inner tranquility is much more pronounced. But doing the foreground-background shift between pīti and sukha serves two purposes: (1) the pīti, which is sometimes uncomfortably strong, is now brought down to an intensity level that is far more bearable, and (2) the generating of inner tranquility has begun.

Then all that is necessary to complete the process of entering the second jhāna is to stay strongly focused on the (now foreground) sukha until the vitakka and vicāra subside and the mind becomes unified around the sukha-pīti experience. There is nothing really to "do." There is only the patient focusing on the happiness/joy. If the concentration generated while you were in access concentration was strong enough, once the foreground-background shift has been made, the vitakka and vicāra do subside on their own, and the unification of mind arises automatically. The second jhāna has arrived.

So why don't I teach like I described above? Well, from a historical perspective, it's because when I learned the jhānas, to move from the first jhāna to the second was to make the foreground-background shift. It was only much later that I realized exactly what the suttas were saying. Then I understood also that I was indeed actually experiencing the second jhāna as described in the suttas, but it was really only occurring some time after I made the foreground-background shift—it was only when I felt I was getting more strongly into the second jhāna that I was actually just arriving there. This realization dawned on me while I was on a long retreat, so I had lots of occasions to carefully observe what was happening and was able to identify exactly what was going on. But I found there really wasn't a distinct "landmark" that marked the shift from the first to the second jhāna. The post-foreground-background shift part of the first

jhāna gave way slowly to a more concentrated state, with the thinking slowly subsiding during that time. When my concentration was really strong, the thinking would completely subside; when my concentration was not as strong, the thinking wouldn't completely go away but would be so intermittent and so far in the background that there was no chance it was going to turn into a distraction. I definitely considered changing the way I taught the second jhāna but realized that without a good landmark to delineate the end of the first jhāna and the beginning of the second, I was more likely to cause confusion, rather than provide instructions that were more helpful than what I had been teaching previously. Given that the foreground-background shift is helpful in all cases, a student would do well to take to heart the instructions given in the chapter above on the second jhāna:

> If you can remain fully focused on the sukha, really giving yourself to this experience of happiness/joy, the thinking will indeed subside and fade more and more the longer you stay there without becoming distracted. . . .
>
> What you want is sukha that is moderately intense and a mind that is strongly unified around this experience of sukha—in other words, moderate happiness/joy, strong one-pointed focus.

Then one will indeed arrive at the second jhāna as described in the suttas.

Students do report that they sometimes are unsure of which jhāna they are in; they know they are really concentrated but are unable to determine clearly the qualities of the mind state. So having easily distinguishable landmarks that mark the transition points seems to be very helpful. By following the instructions given in the chapter on the second jhāna, a student will both have a distinct landmark, and, as they follow the instructions mentioned above, they will indeed progress into the second jhāna as described in the suttas.

So, yes, I am guilty of being more practical than precise. But since the practical instructions enable a student to achieve the precise results, I'm not going to worry about it.

In the suttas it says that vitakka and vicāra are a thorn to the second jhāna.[1] Once the unification of mind has kicked in and the thinking has subsided, there is no guarantee that the thinking won't return. If it does, you are, by definition, back in the first jhāna. Simply redouble your efforts to be undistractedly focused on the sukha; when the thinking subsides again, and that may be quite quickly, you have reentered the second jhāna. The object of the second jhāna—the sukha, with background pīti[a]—is more subtle than the not-at-all subtle pīti of the first jhāna. So it does take good concentration to remain in the second jhāna.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the whole idea of “factors of the first jhāna” is simply not a useful concept. Again, for the second jhāna, it is much more accurate to talk about the qualities of the second jhāna rather than its factors. But that didn’t stop the Abhidhamma and commentaries from listing the factors of the second jhāna as

- pīti,
- sukha,
- ekaggata.

This of course leaves out the two very important qualities of inner tranquility (ajjhattaṃ sampasādana) and unification of mind (ekodi-bhavam). Why weren’t they included? Probably the unification of mind is assumed to be the same as the ekaggata even though they are different words in Pali. But what about the inner tranquility? I can only speculate that adding additional factors goes against the thrust of the jhāna instructions found in the Abhidhamma and commentaries, which basically subtract factors until there are only two factors left—the second one always being ekaggata and the first one changing for each jhāna as one progresses from third jhāna to eighth jhāna.

A correct listing of the qualities of the second jhāna would be

- ajjhattaṃ sampasādana,
- ekodi-bhavam,
- pīti,
- sukha.

But remember: these are best thought of as qualities, not as factors.

In summary, what the sutta description of the second jhāna is saying is the following: Hang out in the first jhāna until your mind calms down. Let the thinking subside as your mind becomes unified around the calmer experience of pīti and sukha. At that point you enter and dwell in the second jhāna, with its inner tranquility and unification of mind. There isn’t any thinking and your mind is filled with pīti and sukha, now born of concentration.

a In DN 9 (Poṭṭhapāda Sutta), we find that after one makes the transition from the first jhāna to the second, “one’s former true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of seclusion vanishes. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of pīti and sukha born of concentration, and one becomes one who is conscious of this pīti and sukha.”

14 Third Jhāna

Further, with the fading away of pīti, one dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences happiness with the body. Thus one enters and dwells in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare: "One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness." One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body with sukha free from pīti, so that there is no part of one's entire body that is not suffused by this sukha. (DN 2.81)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
pīti	glee, rapture
sukha	happiness/joy
upekkha	equanimity, literally "gaze upon"
sukha kāyena	bodily happiness

THE PĪTI, which was so strong in the first jhāna and remained in the background of the second jhāna, now fades away completely. The disappearance of the pīti leaves you in a much calmer state—a state that is equanimous. The word *upekkhako* literally means "gaze upon"—with the sense of gazing upon your experience, being fully engaged, and not being disturbed either positively or negatively. This, along with the sukha that remains, leaves you in a state where it is easy to be mindful and clearly comprehend what you are experiencing.

The sutta description also says one experiences bodily happiness (sukha kāyena). The word translated as "bodily" is *kāyena*, literally "by means of the

body," and the word *body (kāya)* is, as we saw in the discussion of the first jhāna, referring to the physical body. This happiness has arisen due to the pīti fading out—somewhat like the experience of a postorgasmic glow. The suttas mention, "On account of the presence of pīti there is mental exhilaration, and that state is considered gross."[1] The word translated as "mental" is *cetaso*, the genitive of *ceto*, which is derived from *citta*, meaning "heart/mind," and would be as close as Pali comes to describing a "seat of emotions." So to get a more accurate sense of what the description is saying, we can rewrite the phrase "with the fading away of pīti, one . . . experiences happiness with the body" as "with the fading away of pīti (which was producing mental/emotional as well as physical exhilaration), one . . . experiences bodily happiness." And the "drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses" ensures that the happiness is throughout one's whole being.

It is not obvious why the sutta description of this jhāna includes "third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare: 'One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness.'" None of the other jhāna descriptions contain a quote or anything quite like this. Perhaps since a noble one is one who has achieved awakening, it is saying that the state of awakening is a happy state of equanimity and mindfulness, and that the third jhāna provides a hint of what that mind state might be like.

In the suttas it says that pīti is a thorn to the third jhāna.[2] If the pīti fades away on its own and you slide "automatically" to the third jhāna, the pīti is not likely to return. But if you intentionally move to the third jhāna via the method outlined in the earlier chapter on the third jhāna, there is no guarantee that the pīti won't return. If it does, you are, by definition, back in the second jhāna—no matter how contented the sukha feels. If this happens, it is necessary to reestablish your "normal" second jhāna with its foreground sukha and background pīti; then try again to move to the third jhāna. The object of the third jhāna—the sukha[a] as contentment—is even more subtle than the sukha as happiness/joy (plus pīti) of the second jhāna. So it does take even better concentration to remain in the third jhāna.

In the chapter on the first jhāna, we saw that the whole idea of "factors of the first jhāna" is simply not a useful concept. Again, for the third jhāna, it is much more accurate to talk about the qualities of the third jhāna rather than its factors. But that didn't stop the Abhidhamma and commentaries from listing the factors of the third jhāna as

- sukha,

- ekaggata.

They completely ignored the equanimity, mindfulness, clear comprehension, and bodily happiness that are so obviously mentioned in the sutta description of the third jhāna. A correct listing of the qualities mentioned for the third jhāna would be

- upekkha,
- sati,
- sampajañña,
- sukha kāyena,
- sukha.

But the inner tranquility and unification of mind that were established in the second jhāna still remain even though they are not mentioned. So a complete listing of the qualities of the third jhāna would be

- (ajjhattaṃ sampasādana),
- (ekodi-bhavam),
- upekkha,
- sati,
- sampajañña,
- sukha kāyena,
- sukha.

Unlike the factors described in the Abhidhamma and commentaries, the sutta description and actual experience of the third jhāna yield more, not fewer, qualities than those of the second jhāna.

In summary, what the sutta description of the third jhāna is saying is the following: With the fading away of the exhilarating pīti, one dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiences bodily happiness. Thus one enters and remains in the third jhāna, of which the

awakened ones declare: “One dwells happily with equanimity and mindfulness”; one is fully contented.

a In DN 9 (Poṭṭhapāda Sutta), we find that after one makes the transition from the second jhāna to the third, “one’s former true but subtle sense of pīti and sukha born of concentration vanishes, and there arises at that time a true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness [i.e., contentment], and one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness.”

15 Fourth Jhāna

Further, with the abandoning of sukha and dukkha, and with the previous passing away of somanassa and domanassa, one enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is adukkha and asukha and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity. One sits suffusing one's body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of one's entire body not suffused by a pure bright mind. (DN 2.81)

KEY PALI WORDS:

samādhi	indistractability, concentration
sukha and dukkha	pleasure and pain
adukkha and asukha	neither painful nor pleasant
somanassa and domanassa	joy and grief
sati	mindfulness
upekkha	equanimity
pārisuddhi	purity

In the later Abhidhamma and commentaries, *sukha and dukkha* came to mean physical pleasure and pain while *somanassa and domanassa* came to mean mental joy and sorrow. But in the suttas, the meanings of these words are not so fixed. For example, we find *sukha and dukkha* used in the discussion *of vedanā* (feelings or feeling tone),[1] and vedanā are always mental, even though at times they derive from the five external (physical) senses.

So to determine the exact usage of these words in the context of the fourth

jhāna, it is necessary to understand both the qualities of the previous jhānas and the target of the fourth jhāna. The most obvious components of the previous jhānas are the pīti and sukha. The pīti, with its exhilarating glee, is present in the first and second jhānas but has "passed away" by the third jhāna. The sukha, with its pleasant joyfulness, has decreased in intensity by the third jhāna but is still present and pleasant.

The target of the fourth jhāna is to be without pleasure and pain and to be equanimous. This indicates that the mind is to become emotionally neutral in the fourth jhāna. Thus the two rhyming phrases (in Pali) "sukhassa and dukkhassa" and "somanassa and domanassa" are used to point toward the neutral state between the extremes mentioned in those phrases, as does the semantically related phrase "adukkha and asukha."

The word *somanassa* derives from *su* + *mano*, meaning "happy mind," the *su* being the same as in *sukha*. *Somanassa* is a synonym of *veda* according to the Pali Text Society's dictionary. *Veda*, according to the same dictionary, means "(joyful) feeling, religious feeling, enthusiasm, awe, emotion, excitement." The combination of exhilarating pīti and joyful sukha in the first and second jhānas is being referred to here as *somanassa*. *Domanassa* is just the rhyming opposite of *somanassa* and is being used in contrast so that the combination points to neutrality. The "equanimity and happiness" of the third jhāna is definitely pleasant and is referred to here as *sukhassa*. Its opposite, *dukkhassa* is used again to point to the neutrality of the fourth jhāna. Notice also the alliteration of *sukhassa* and *somanassa* and of *dukkhassa* and *domanassa* and the rhyming *assa* in all four words, which serve to help memorization.[2]

The phrase translated as "contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity" is *upekkha-sati-pārisuddhim*, which is a triple compound. Sometimes you will see it translated as "purified by equanimity and mindfulness" rather than "mindfulness fully purified by equanimity." *Upekkha* of course is "equanimity," and *sati* is "mindfulness." *Pārisuddhi* means "purity," but the triple compound could be interpreted multiple ways and justify either of these translations.

The "drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body" is now replaced with "sits suffusing one's body," which makes sense given how much more calm the fourth jhāna is.

Notice also that in the previous jhānas, the body is to be suffused with the object of attention; here the body is to be suffused with a new term not previously mentioned: "the pure bright mind" (parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena). *Cetasā* is "mind," and both of the other words mean "clean, clear, pure." Sometimes the phrase *parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena* is translated as "mental purity and clarification." Either way it is certainly pointing to a subtle,

unruffled mind state.

In the suttas it says that in-and-out breathing is a thorn to the fourth jhāna.[3] This is misinterpreted by the later literature to mean that one ceases to breath in the fourth jhāna.[a] This is quite absurd—people who quit breathing soon become dead! What it actually means is that in the fourth jhāna, things are so quiet and still, and the object of your attention is so subtle, that your breathing can become distracting. Of course the later literature could not interpret this thorn that way since the later literature claims that even in the first jhāna, one is so deeply absorbed as to have no bodily awareness.

Again, for the fourth jhāna, it is much more accurate to talk about the qualities of the fourth jhāna rather than its factors. But that didn't stop the Abhidhamma and commentaries from listing the factors of the fourth jhāna as

- upekkha,
- ekaggata.

Why isn't sati (mindfulness) one of the factors? Perhaps since they considered mindfulness to be a factor for all wholesome states, they didn't feel a need to mention it. But they also considered ekaggata to be a factor of all mental states, so that conjecture makes no sense since they explicitly list it for each of the jhānas.

The neither pleasant nor painful quality (adukkha and asukha) is the object of attention in the fourth jhāna,[b] so certainly it is a very important quality of the fourth jhāna. The actual qualities mentioned in the usual sutta description of the fourth jhāna are

- adukkha and asukha,
- upekkha,
- sati.

The more elaborate sutta descriptions of the fourth jhāna also mention "the pure bright mind," so that would give us

- adukkha and asukha,
- upekkha,
- sati,
- parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena.

And again, there seem to be important qualities of mind that were developed in the earlier jhānas that would still be qualities of the fourth jhāna: the inner tranquility and unification of mind established in the second jhāna and the clear comprehension established in the third jhāna. So a complete listing of the qualities of the fourth jhāna would be

- (ajjhattaṃ sampasādana),
- (ekodi-bhavam),
- (sampajañña),
- adukkha and asukha,
- upekkha,
- sati,
- parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena.

The qualities may be numerous, but the actual experience is very simple: undistracted quiet stillness.

In summary, what the sutta description of the fourth jhāna is saying is the following: With the abandoning of the pleasure of the third jhāna, and with the previous passing away of the joyful excitement of the first and second jhānas, one enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is emotionally neutral and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity. One sits suffusing one's body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of one's entire body not suffused by a pure bright mind.

a Johannes Bronkhorst *(The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, 1993) and Grzegorz Polak *(Reexamining Jhāna: Towards a Critical Reconstruction of Early Buddhist Soteriology*, 2011) feel that this later idea of stopping the in- and out-breaths is due to influence from both Jain and early Hindu meditation

techniques.

b In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.13), we find that after one makes the transition from the third jhāna to the fourth, “one’s former true but subtle sense of equanimity and happiness vanishes, and there arises a true but subtle sense of neither pleasure nor pain, and one becomes one who is conscious of this true but subtle sense of neither pleasure nor pain.”

16 The Jhāna Summary

When one sees that these five hindrances have been abandoned within oneself, gladness arises. From gladness, rapture arises. When one's mind is filled with rapture, one's body becomes tranquil; tranquil in body, one experiences happiness; being happy, one's mind becomes concentrated. (DN 2.76)

KEY PALI WORDS:

Pāmojja	gladness
pīti	glee, rapture
passaddhakāya	bodily tranquility
sukha	happiness/joy
samādhi	indistractability, concentration

THE ABOVE PERICOPE,[a] or something quite similar to it, appears in a number of suttas.[1] In the detailed description of the gradual training, it is found between the abandoning of the hindrances and the description of the first jhāna. Now that we've gained an understanding of exactly what is being referred to in the jhāna description found in the suttas, we can unpack this pericope.

The commentaries go to great length to explain how this pericope is showing what happens between the abandoning of the hindrances and the onset of the first jhāna. They discuss how it shows both access concentration and absorption concentration. They indicate that everything from the abandoning of the hindrances through the happiness is access concentration, and then becoming concentrated is absorption concentration. The gladness is identified with

showering pīti and is said to be “tender pīti.” Because the word *kāyo* is associated with the tranquility, the tranquility is said to be mental since *kāya* means “group, heap, collection” and thus refers to one’s being and hence can be interpreted as mental tranquility.[2]

However, the commentaries have completely missed the mark! The abandoning of the hindrances, the pericope above, and the jhāna descriptions are *not* three things in a linear progression. What actually is there is the abandoning of the hindrances, a summary of the whole arc of jhānic experience, and then a full detailed description of the jhānas. A similar pattern occurs earlier in the gradual training. Right after a householder goes forth, there is a summary of the sīla practices: “Having gone forth, one dwells restrained by the restraint of the rules, . . . with the sense-doors guarded, skilled in mindful awareness and content.”[3] This is followed by a detailed description of the precepts, guarding the senses, mindful awareness, and contentment. The context there makes it very clear it is just a summary.

Most likely this pericope is a late insertion into the gradual training: it’s certainly missing a context that makes it clear that it is a summary, it is redundant, it doesn’t occur in all recensions of the gradual training, and it seems to have been lifted from other suttas, particularly from the Saṃyutta Nikāya.

The key words also point to this pericope being a summary:

- gladness (pāmojja),
- rapture (pīti),
- bodily tranquility (passaddhakāya),
- happiness (sukha),
- concentration (samādhi).

The gladness occurs prior to the arising of the first jhāna—it arises due to the abandoning of the hindrances. Or to put it another way, the gladness arises when access concentration has been established.[b] “From gladness, rapture arises.” As mentioned in the chapter “Entering the Jhānas,” you generate pīti by focusing on a pleasant sensation without becoming distracted and thereby set up a positive feedback loop of pleasure that eventually erupts in pīti-sukha. The enjoyment of the pleasant sensation I’m instructing you to put your attention on after having firmly established access concentration is precisely what is being referred to by this *gladness*. I have not found anyone else, either ancient or modern, noting this

key point for entering the first jhāna.

Pīti is the primary quality of the first jhāna and persists less intensely in the second jhāna, where inner tranquility (ajjhattaṃ sampasādana) arises. This inner tranquility is not mentioned in the jhāna summary; it is not the same words as the bodily tranquility (passaddhakāya) that is mentioned.

With the ceasing of the pīti at the onset of the third jhāna, bodily tranquility (passaddhakāya) is experienced. The commentaries could be right in interpreting *kāyo* as "being," in which case this could very well be referring to the mental "inner tranquility" that arises with the subsiding of vitakka and vicāra (thinking) at the onset of the second jhāna. Almost certainly *kāyo* does refer to the physical body as well, if not exclusively. With the pīti gone, one "experiences happiness with the body," exactly as is mentioned in the description of the third jhāna. And as also mentioned above, this is like the experience of a postorgasmic glow. Anyone who has experienced "all-pervasive" pīti immediately realizes that the experience of such intense pīti has nothing in common with bodily tranquility. The only way bodily tranquility can arise is if the pīti ceases—and that is exactly what happens. And not just as the pīti ceases: the bodily tranquility is actually generated by the deflating of the excited pīti energy.

Now with things calmed down, you can rest in the primary experience of the third jhāna, which is contentment—sukha infused with equanimity and mindfulness. After letting your mind grow even more settled, you abandon the pleasure of the third jhāna and sink down into the deep concentration of the fourth jhāna.

We can now construct the following table:

- abandoning the hindrances—access concentration
- gladness (pāmojja)—focusing on the pleasant sensation
- rapture (pīti)—first and second jhānas
- bodily tranquility (passaddhakāya)—second and third jhānas
- happiness (sukha)—third jhāna (the pīti is gone since passaddhakāya precedes this; therefore, third jhāna only)
- concentration (samādhi)—fourth jhāna

A very similar progression of "gladness, rapture, tranquility, happiness, concentration, knowing & seeing things as they are" occurs in the Upanisā Sutta (SN 12.23) with each item being dependent upon the previous. However, there

tranquility is *passaddhi*, with no reference to any *kāya*. *This* sequence could very well be interpreted as "gladness, first jhāna, second jhāna, third jhāna, fourth jhāna, and knowing and seeing things as they are," the latter being insight/wisdom. This again points to our pericope being a jhāna summary.

Now, I have to admit, I figured out that I was entering the first jhāna by establishing access concentration and then focusing on a pleasant sensation more than a decade before I realized the paragraph here is a jhāna summary that contains valuable information about entering and moving between the jhānas. The information given in the suttas is so terse that you pretty much have to be skilled in the jhānas before you can puzzle out what the suttas are actually describing. But once you do understand what they are describing, you find the jhānas described in the suttas to be concentration states that are accessible by many people and can furthermore turbocharge their insight practice.

a A pericope is a "stock passage" of text that forms one coherent unit or thought.
b Abandoning the hindrances is only one of a number of descriptions mentioned in the suttas of establishing access concentration. See for example the Mahānāma Sutta at AN 11.12 for six recollection practices that establish access concentration and are followed by this jhāna summary.

17 Insight Knowledge

> *When one's mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, one directs and inclines it to knowing and seeing. One understands thus, this is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion, and this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it. (DN 2.83)*

THE PALI WORD translated as "body" in the above description of insight practice is *kāya* and is clearly referring to the physical body since it is said to be *rūpī* and *cātummahābhūtiko*, meaning "having material form and composed of the four primary elements." This is the same as the body (kāya) that one is to drench, steep, saturate, and suffuse.

This body is to be investigated from several angles. It is to be seen as material and constructed from the elements via nutriment. This body had a beginning, and because it is impermanent, it will come to an end—and along the way it will be subject to dukkha. These investigations are helpful to see the body's impermanent nature and help bring about disidentification with it. In a number of suttas,[1] the Buddha points out that something that is impermanent and dukkha is not worthy of being thought of as "my self." This leads to disenchantment (i.e., dispels the enchantment) with the body, which is one of the steps necessary for being able to let go sufficiently to achieve awakening.

The word translated as "consciousness" is *viññāna*. *Viññāna* is used in many different ways in the suttas—as a synonym for "mind," as "sense consciousness," as one of the five aggregates, as the sixth element.[2] Here, *viññāna* is being used synonymously for "mind" as a counterpart to *kāya* for "body." This usage is fairly rare in the suttas—the most common way of

referring to “mind and body” is *nāma-rūpa*.[a] *The* rarity of this usage and the pervasive usage *of nāma-rūpa* would tend to indicate that this particular paragraph (pericope, actually) is an early composition.

What you are to notice about your mind is that it is supported by and bound up with your body. This phrase and the Buddha’s rebuke of Sati (who believed his consciousness transmigrated at death) in the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38) are two of the clearest indications that the Buddha did not teach reincarnation. Your consciousness/mind is a dependent phenomenon, dependent on your impermanent body. This impermanent consciousness is not worthy of being thought of as “my self,” and again this leads to disenchantment.

In the suttas, there is a simile given for insight knowledge: “It is just as if there were a gem, a beryl, pure, excellent, well cut into eight facets, clear, bright, unflawed, perfect in every respect, strung on a blue, yellow, red, white or orange cord. A man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand and inspecting it, would describe it as such” (DN 2.86).

Clear beryl is very transparent, and it would be very easy to see the thread inside the gem. This seeing into is of course what we mean by *insight. The* concentrated, post-jhānic mind is well suited to examine the reality of body and mind and see into the deeper truths available when looking from a less egocentric perspective.

a *Nāma-rūpa* would more accurately be translated as “mentality and materiality.”

18 The Immaterial States

> *Four things which were perfectly proclaimed by the Lord . . . [include] . . . four āruppa. (DN 33 1.11.7)*

THE WORD *āruppa* would be best translated as "immaterial states." These "higher attainments" are never referred to in the suttas as *jhānas*, although they are mentioned in a large number of suttas. Sometimes they are discussed by themselves; sometimes they are combined with the four jhānas to make a sequence of eight states of concentration. In later literature they came to be known as the "four immaterial jhānas"—the *arūpa jhānas. The* four jhānas of the suttas were then referred to as *rūpa jhānas. This* was a quite handy innovation because now the word *jhāna* could be used to refer to all eight states. *Rūpa* or *arūpa* could then be prefixed to designate the four jhānas or the four immaterial states when such a distinction needed to be made.

The Pali word *rūpa* means "materiality." The choice of *rūpa* probably was made based on it being the semantic opposite of *arūpa*, which was already being used to refer to the immaterial states. These four rūpa jhānas are obviously not material; they are mental states. But there are valid reasons to refer to the four jhānas of the suttas as *rūpa jhānas*. Certainly in the first jhāna, there is a material component, since the pīti is strongly felt in the body. Also for each of these four jhānas, the suttas say something like, "One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body." Clearly in the rūpa jhānas, you are still aware of your material body: you can feel the rapture in your body; you can spread the qualities throughout your body; you experience the happiness with your body in the third jhāna.

Another quality of the rūpa jhānas is that these are experiences that we have had in the material world. We've all experienced rapture, happiness, contentment, and equanimity. But in the rūpa jhānas, these are more refined states, so they are sometimes called "fine (or refined) material jhānas." In

contrast, the experiences of the four arūpa states are unlike anything we have experienced in the material world.

Sometimes people want to make the immaterial states into an experience of tapping into an ontologically existent infinite space, infinite consciousness, realm of nothingness, and/or realm of neither perception nor nonperception. It's true that in later Buddhism, there came to be the understanding that these states were a "visit" to 4 of the 31 realms of existence. And in pre-Buddhist Brahmanism, this seems to be the assumption, given the Buddha-to-be's comments in the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (MN 26.15–16) that the last two of these states led only to reappearance in the corresponding realm. But the early sutta understanding is not that these states corresponded to any ontologically existent realms—the Buddha of the early suttas is portrayed as a phenomenologist, not a metaphysicist.

The Buddha was often asked a ten-point "questionnaire" about his teachings. This included "Is the cosmos infinite or not?" He refused to give an answer to any of these questions, saying that they were "not conducive to the purpose, not conducive to Dhamma, not the way to embark on the holy life."[1] In other words, trying to obtain answers to these questions was a waste of time and energy. But had the Buddha felt that the experience of the realm of infinite space (ākāsānañcāyatana) was an experience of something that is ontologically existent, there would be no effort needed to confirm that the cosmos was infinite, and he could have immediately answered that the cosmos is indeed infinite.[a] His refusal to answer the question one way or the other would imply that he did not think he was experiencing an ontologically existent infinite space in the first of the immaterial states.

In the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38), when speaking to Sati (who held a wrong view of consciousness), several monks insist, "In many ways the Blessed One has stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness." Sati's wrong view was not that there is an ontologically existent infinite consciousness, but the Buddha's reasons for categorically rejecting Sati's view also apply here. In the teachings of dependent origination, consciousness is said to be dependently arisen. In some suttas it is said to originate dependent on mind and body (nāma-rūpa);[2] in others it arises dependent on fabrications (sankhara).[3] This is not a contradiction; it's simply that consciousness arises dependent on more than one thing—just like many things in the world. What is important is to realize that no consciousness is independently, ontologically existent. Consciousness only arises dependent on a mind and a sense organ plus an object of that consciousness. The realm of infinite consciousness (viññāṇañcāyatana) of the second immaterial state, for all its

infiniteness, is still a consciousness and cannot have independent existence. Postulating a dependent ontologically existent external infinite consciousness that can be tapped into doesn't help either. It would require some mind to be always hanging around generating this infinite consciousness—and that's beginning to sound a lot like postulating the existence of an eternal God, which the Buddha clearly rejected.

Both of these experiences are just mental experiences that are perceived[b] as an experience of something external and infinite. Misperceptions abound, and on the spiritual path, it is very important not to be fooled by them.

Given that the first two immaterial states are only mental experiences that are perceived in a way that makes them seem external, it is also quite likely that the third of these states, the realm of nothingness (ākiñcaññāyatana), is also just an experience and not a tapping into some ontologically existent nothingness. However, unlike the previous two states, there is nothing in the Buddha's teachings that can easily be used to point to the existence or nonexistence of some ontologically existent nothingness. Given this lack of sutta material, attempting to prove there is or is not some external ontologically existent realm of nothingness would "not [be] conducive to the purpose, not conducive to Dhamma, not the way to embark on the holy life."

If on the other hand, as some scholars propose, these immaterial states were inserted into the suttas at a later time,[4] the question of whether or not they correspond to ontologically existent realms becomes moot. The questions now become who did these insertions, what was their agenda, and what was their belief system? A detailed discussion of this proposition is beyond the scope of the present work.

The phrase translated as "the realm of neither perception nor nonperception" is the Pali phrase *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*. *The* word *saññā* is usually translated as "perception," meaning the ability to name or identify the object of sensory input. But *saññā* can also mean "consciousness"—it certainly appears to have that meaning in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9) and perhaps also in the Kalahavivāda Sutta (Snp 4.11). The *Pali-English Dictionary* gives both "consciousness" and "perception" as meanings, and, under meaning number 3, indicates that *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana* should be translated as "neither consciousness nor unconsciousness." In "The Origin of Buddhist Meditation," Alexander Wynne provides a long discussion of *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana* as a pre-Buddhist meditative state.[5] From that discussion, it seems quite possible that the correct translation *of nevasaññānāsaññāyatana* should be "the realm of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness."

Unfortunately, getting the name of this state correct still does not provide any

more possible way to describe it. The mind is energized (this is not “sinking mind”!) and very clear, but it is not possible to describe the object of concentration other than to say “the mind is in a state that you can’t describe.” And again, there is no early sutta material that would indicate that the Buddha taught that this was an ontologically existent realm.

a The Pali word *ananta* (infinite) is used in reference to both “infinite space” and “infinite cosmos.”
b The Pali word *saññā* applies here—“naming,” “identifying,” “conceptualizing.”

19 The Cessation of Perception and Feeling

> *"Mental activity is worse for me, lack of mental activity is better. If I were to think and imagine, these perceptions [that I have attained] would cease, and coarser perceptions would arise in me. Suppose I were not to think or imagine?" So one neither thinks nor imagines. And then, for one, just these perceptions arise, but other, coarser perceptions do not arise. One attains cessation. (DN 9.17)*

THERE IS ANOTHER STATE of very deep concentration called "the cessation of perception and feeling (saññāvedayitanirodha)." In the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9), Poṭṭhapāda, who is an ascetic from another sect, wants to know about abhisaññānirodha—literally "higher perception cessation"—which is just another name for saññāvedayitanirodha. This state of cessation is sometimes referred to in later literature as the *ninth jhāna*, but this term seems to produce more confusion than clarity. It is true that in the suttas, attaining the jhānas and immaterial states in sequence from one to either seven or eight is used to generate the concentration necessary to enter this state. But it is a state of suspended animation and quite unlike any of the four jhānas or four immaterial states.

Sometimes this state is referred to with just the word *nirodha*. *The* Pali word *nirodha* means "cessation" and occurs in several contexts, so it is important to identify exactly what is being referred to when it is used without any qualifiers. Among the contexts are the following:

- a deep concentration state—saññāvedayitanirodha
- the cessation of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion—synonymous with full awakening, *nibbāna*
- the truth of cessation—the third noble truth of the cessation of dukkha

- cessation in dependent origination—the ceasing of each "link" generating the ceasing of the next link
- cessation as the fifteenth step of the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing
- cessation in the phrase "disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calm, higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nibbāna" (e.g., DN 9.30)
- cessation as the "experience without an experiencer" of a path moment—described in the sixteen insight knowledges of the progress of insight found in the *Visuddhimagga*[1]

It is definitely recommended that the word *nirodha* not be used without qualifiers until it is clear that all parties understand just what context is being referred to.

The state of saññāvedayitanirodha is mentioned in a number of suttas,[2] perhaps most famously in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16) where the Buddha indicates at verse 2.25 that "it is only when the Tathāgata withdraws his attention from outward signs, and by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind, that his body knows comfort" and again in verse 6.8 where the Buddha enters the cessation of perception and feeling as he is dying.

In the Cūḷasuññata Sutta (MN 121), at verse 11 the Buddha describes attaining full awakening based on "attending to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind." The commentaries do not recognize "the signless concentration of mind" as being the same as the cessation of perception and feeling, but possibly they are mistaken. It seems that one emerging from the cessation of perception and feeling has the ability to watch the world and one's self reassemble and from that gains the realization necessary for full awakening.

But entering the cessation of perception and feeling requires extremely deep concentration. It is said that nonreturners and arahats[a] can enter this state for up to a week. This is usually misinterpreted that only nonreturners and arahats can enter this state,[3] but that does not seem to be the case. However, it may be that only someone who is that spiritually advanced can enter this state for as long as a week.

The award-winning documentary *Short Cut to Nirvana*—a documentary about the Indian Kumbh Mela spiritual festival[4]—contains a scene where a Japanese woman climbs down a ladder into a deep pit. The ladder is withdrawn, and the pit is covered in roofing tin and then dirt. Three days later there is another scene

where the dirt and roofing tin are removed, and she climbs out all smiles. She seemingly had to have been in the state of cessation of perception and feeling—suspended animation.

On a trip to Thailand in 1988, I was there for the Thai New Year's festival, which takes place in the spring at the end of the hot season and the beginning of the rainy season. This is "spring cleaning" time. Originally water was captured after it had been poured over the Buddha statues to clean them, and then this "blessed" water was used to give good fortune to one's elders by gently pouring it on their shoulders. Among young people the holiday evolved to include dousing strangers with water (supposedly to relieve the heat). This has further evolved into water fights and splashing water over people riding in vehicles. It's quite a participatory festival to say the least!

I walked down to the main square in Chiang Mai on the first day of the festival. It was quite a chaotic scene with people throwing water at each other, onto passing motorcycles, and into the windows of passing cars and buses. But off to one side, out of the way of the water throwing, a small pavilion had been set up. There was a monk seated in full lotus posture in the pavilion, obviously in deep meditation. His eyes were open and downcast, and he had the most serene look on his face I'd ever seen. He was clearly not disturbed by all the chaos happening around him. He was there that afternoon when the big parade came by. He was there that night when they held the first round of the beauty pageant on a stage 30 yards away. He was there the second day, all day and into the evening. He was still there on the third morning. He looked a little tired—serenely tired. He was there that afternoon when the biggest parade of all came by. He was still there that night during the final round of the beauty pageant. He was gone the next morning. He had to have been in saññāvedayitanirodha. There is no way someone could serenely sit without moving in the midst of all that chaos unless they had entered into such a deep state of concentration. It was quite inspiring.

It has been mentioned earlier that there seems to be quite a difference in the understanding of exactly what constitutes the jhānic states between what is described in the suttas and what is described in the later Abhidhamma and commentaries. The *Visuddhimagga* describes the first jhāna in such a way that it is a state of nonperception. There are no body sensations; no sounds are heard; there is not even the sense of time passing.[5] Now this is very different from the description of the suttas where one not only has body awareness but even "drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one's body with the pīti and sukha." In fact, the description of the first jhāna in the *Visuddhimagga* sounds quite a bit like a state of no feeling and no perception: saññāvedayitanirodha. This

correspondence has been pointed out by Roderick Bucknell in his very interesting article “Reinterpreting the Jhānas.”[6]

I personally don’t have much experience with the *Visuddhimagga* jhānas. But I do have a bit. I have attended two long retreats with the Venerable Pa Auk, who teaches exactly what is described in the *Visuddhimagga*. During the second one, after being on retreat for almost five months, I did enter a state where there was no feeling, no perception, no body sensations, no sounds, and no passage of time. My approach to this state corresponded step by step exactly to what is found in the *Visuddhimagga*, and it was later confirmed to be the first jhāna. But my experience also exactly matches what is described in the suttas for the cessation of perception and feeling. This state is attainable—with lots of deep practice. But since I was only able to get there once, I have no real experience of its usefulness for gaining insight into the nature of reality.

a Those at the third stage of awakening or fully awakened.

20 The Psychic Powers

> *When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to wielding the various kinds of supernormal powers. (DN 2.87)*

IN ADDITION to describing how to use your jhānically concentrated mind to gain insight into body and mind, the gradual training describes, in its more detailed recensions, being able to wield various psychic powers (iddhi). These six powers can be divided into three groups of two each, which we will examine in turn.

The first group consists of the mind-made body and the various kinds of supernormal powers. The mind-made body is described thus:

> When one's mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from deffects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, one directs and inclines it to creating from this body another body having form, mind-made, with all its limbs, lacking no faculty. (DN 2.85)

It's not really clear what is going on here. But there is a simile:

> Just as though a man were to pull out a reed from its sheath and think thus: "This is the sheath, this is the reed; the sheath is one, the reed is another; it is from the sheath that the reed has been pulled out"; or just as though a man were to pull out a sword from its scabbard and think thus: "This is the sword, this is the scabbard; the sword is one, the scabbard another; it is from the scabbard that the sword has been pulled out"; or just as though a man were to pull a snake out of its slough and think thus: "This is the snake, this is the slough; the snake is one, the slough another; it is from the slough that the snake has been pulled out." (DN 2.86)

Well, that didn't help much. Let's skip it for the moment and examine wielding

the various supernormal powers:

> When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to wielding the various kinds of supernormal powers: being one, one becomes many; having been many, they become one; one appears and vanishes; one goes unhindered through walls, through enclosures, through mountains, as though through space; one dives in and out of the earth as though it were water; one walks on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, one travels in space like birds; with one's hands one touches and strokes the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; one wields bodily mastery even as far as the Brahma-world. (DN 2.87)

You can take this as literally true—but if you do, you might want to skip to the end of this chapter; I have a background in science, and I'm not buying it.

I had an interesting conversation with a student who is very skilled in lucid dreaming—a dream in which you are aware that you are dreaming. He mentioned that not only can you control what happens in a lucid dream—like being able to fly—but also that it is possible, with training, to go from a waking state directly into a lucid dream. In other words, you don't have to fall asleep, wait until you start dreaming, and then recognize you are dreaming. You can train yourself in what is called the *WILD technique:* wake induced lucid dreaming. Is this what is being talked about in the description of the mind-made body? It certainly makes sense—emerging from the fourth jhāna, you have exactly the type of preliminary mind state that the instructions for WILD recommend: quiet, calm, relaxed, not distractable. This would be a great jumping off point for entering a lucid dream. And when you have manifested that lucid dream, you can walk on water, dive into the earth, pass through walls and ramparts unimpeded, and fly through the air—just like in the description of the various kinds of supernormal powers.

There is even a sutta that strongly hints at the powers being solitary. In Anguttara-Nikāya 3.60, the Buddha is having a conversation with the brahmin Saṅgārava. After some discussion of these various kinds of powers, Saṅgārava says, "Only the one who performs this wonder experiences it and it occurs only to him." This is totally congruent with these supernormal powers being a lucid dream. One can learn to enter such dreams via the mind-made body, which is known today as *WILD*.

Like the investigation of your body and mind in the post-jhānic state, these supernormal powers also provide insight—not so much into the nature of reality, but rather into the dreamlike quality of reality. We have a very strong tendency

to ignore many of the subtle qualities of reality and just accept that what we perceive is the way things really are. But having gained mastery of lucid dreaming, you would certainly become more aware that just because you perceive something, it doesn't make it reality. The Buddha clearly is not an idealist,[a] but he definitely does not want us blindly trusting our perceptions, especially those of a permanent, ultimately satisfying reality full of separately existing entities.[b] [c]

When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, one hears both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near. (DN 2.91)

> When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to understanding the minds of others, having encompassed them with their own minds. (DN 2.93)
>
> The next two psychic powers correspond to what today we call *ESP*—extra sensory perception. There are ongoing arguments between those who believe ESP is real and those who think people are just misunderstanding their experiences. We can assign these two powers as being manifestations of what we call *ESP* without having to decide on the scientific validity of ESP. There is certainly something going on among those who believe in ESP, and whether they are just fooling themselves or are actually tapping into something that science is unable to measure is actually irrelevant for explaining these powers—they are what we today call *ESP. The* first one corresponds to what we call "clairaudience" and the second to "reading someone's mind."

Again, whether or not ESP is scientifically valid, insight can be gained from practicing these two powers—insight into the fact that we are not as separate as it visually appears. Albert Einstein has a wonderful quote about our blindness to this interrelatedness:

> A human being is part of a whole, called by us the "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.[1]

The last pair of psychic powers have to do with the always touchy subject of rebirth:

> When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to recollecting their manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: "There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named . . . and passing away from there, I reappeared here." (DN 2.95)
>
> When one's mind is thus concentrated, . . . one directs and inclines it to the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, they see beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. They understand how beings pass on according to their actions. (DN 2.97)

In a number of suttas,[2] it says the Buddha, on the night of his awakening, after moving through the four jhānas, spent the first watch of the night remembering his previous births as described in this power. Because India is near the equator, a night there is about 12 hours long all year round. Since there are three watches of the night, the length of each watch is about four hours. If we "do the math" and compute how long the Buddha-to-be had to remember each of a hundred thousand births, it comes to one-seventh of a second.[d] He had to remember eight things about each birth in one-seventh of a second and repeat that in the next one-seventh of a second and so on nonstop for four hours. The human mind can only process at most about 40 conscious moments per second.[3] If he had to know eight pieces of information in one-seventh of a second, that's 56 conscious moments per second—and we haven't even addressed the "many aeons," whatever that number might be. And you can't say, "He's the Buddha!" because that won't happen for another four to eight hours. So it seems we cannot take the description of remembering past lives literally, at least for the Buddha on the night of his awakening.

The suttas also describe the Buddha practicing the last of these psychic powers, the divine eye, during the second watch of the night on the night of his awakening. This pair of psychic powers are referred to as *true knowledges*. They, along with the third true knowledge of the ending of the āsavas (discussed in the

next chapter), make up the “three true knowledges” of Buddhism, in contrast to the “three knowledges” (Three Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama) of Brahmanism.

These two psychic post-jhānic activities actually occur more often in the suttas than directing and inclining the jhānically concentrated mind to knowing and seeing. Presumably both of these psychic powers give you insight into impermanence, not-self, and the workings of karma.

It appears that after the parinibbāna of the Buddha, two factions arose in the saṅgha: one was made up of “dhamma specialists” who adopted a predominantly cognitive approach to the dhamma; the others were meditators, who practiced the four jhānas, the four immaterial states, and the psychic powers. The Cunda Sutta at AN 6.46 urges harmony between the factions, and there are other suttas that also seem to hint at this split.[4] It seems the dhamma specialists favored the teaching on the five aggregates and were apparently practicing sīla and paññā while the meditators were practicing sīla, samādhi, and iddhi. Apparently harmony between the factions was restored, because we find both plenty of examples of suttas where people reach awakening via insight into the five aggregates[e] and plenty of examples where people (most frequently mentioned is the Buddha) reach awakening via practicing these last two psychic powers plus the ending of the āsavas.[f] This may account for the predominance in the Pali canon of practicing these three true knowledges over directing and inclining the jhānically concentrated mind to knowing and seeing.[g]

There is a Tibetan story about a young man who studied for many years with a master. Finally his teacher told him it was time to go off on his own and meditate. He found a cave not too far from a village where he could go on alms rounds and settled in to practice. During the next 20 years, he learned to walk on water—a shortcut to town since there was a river between his cave and the village.

One day he was in town and heard news that his old master was coming for a visit. He excitedly returned home to his cave and made it as nice as he could. And sure enough a few days later his master appeared. They had a joyful reunion. After exchanging many greetings and good wishes, his master said to him, “Well, what have you learned in these 20 years?” The no-longer-so-young man stood up, walked down to the river, and strode across to the other side. He came back all smiles. But his master said to him, “You fool! You’ve wasted 20 years of your life! There’s a bridge a quarter mile upstream.”

In the Kevaddha Sutta (DN 11.4 and 7), the Buddha says, referring to both the various supernormal powers and knowing the minds of others, “Seeing the danger of such miracles, I dislike, reject and despise them.” There is also a foolish monk named Sunakkhatta who left the monkhood because the Buddha

didn’t perform any miracles,[b] which certainly casts doubt on all the accounts of miracles that are found in the suttas.

So don’t waste your life messing around with any supernormal powers. The jhānas are for turbocharging your insight practice. Deep insights into the inconstant, ultimately unsatisfactory, empty nature of the universe are what will liberate you from dukkha.

a Idealism asserts that reality, or reality as we can know it, is fundamentally mental, mentally constructed, or otherwise immaterial.

b See SN 12.15 for more on the Buddha’s teaching of the middle way between existence and nonexistence.

c For an interesting article on lucid dreams and virtual reality, see “Lucid Dreams, the Original Virtual Reality” at http://elevr.com/lucid-dreams-the-original-virtual-reality/.

d 4 hours = 4 × 60 minutes = 4 × 60 × 60 seconds = 14,400 seconds. 14,400 ÷ 100,000 = 0.144 or one-seventh of a second per birth.

e In fact we find suttas where the five aggregates seem to have been stuffed into an existing sutta in a way that actually doesn’t make a whole lot of sense—see for example DN 14.2.22 and SN 12.23.

f Both Bronkhorst *(Two Traditions*, section 8.4.3, p. 78 and section 9.2.7, p. 93ff) and Polak *(ReexaminingJhāna*, 103) feel that these two psychic powers were inserted during a later period into the original text of the Buddha’s awakening.

g Bronkhorst *(Two Traditions*, section 9.2.7, p. 93) points to a Sūtra of the Sarvastivadins (MĀc p. 589c14–23) in which the account of the Buddha’s liberation is without these two psychic powers. He feels that the account of the Buddha’s liberation originally made no mention of his earlier lives and of the knowledge of the births and deaths of beings. On page 94 he writes, “Schmithausen (1981: 221–22, n. 75) comes to the same conclusion, also basing himself on texts which describe the way to salvation for others than the Buddha. The *Madhyama Āgama* (T. 26), Schmithausen observes, seems to have fewer accounts *with* memory of earlier lives and knowledge of the births and deaths of beings, than *without*.”

h DN 24. Sunakkhatta appears in MN 12 and MN 105 as well. He also complained that the Buddha didn’t explain to him the beginning of things.

21 Ending the Āsavas

> *Concentration, when imbued with ethics, brings great fruit and profit. Wisdom, when imbued with concentration, brings great fruit and profit. The mind imbued with wisdom becomes completely free from the āsavas, that is, from the intoxicants of sensuality, of becoming, of false views and of ignorance. (DN 16.1.12)*

THE LAST STEP GIVEN in the gradual training is the ending of the āsavas.[a] The Pali word *āsava* gets variously translated as "outflows," "influxes," "effluents," "cankers," "taints." According to the Pali Text Society's dictionary, *āsava* literally means "that which flows (out or on to) outflow & influx." It is a word used by the Jains to indicate that which has to be stopped in order to escape the wheel of birth and death—basically, these influxes are the bad karma that has to be avoided. As he so often did, the Buddha took a popular word from a competing spiritual tradition and tweaked it to give it a new meaning. Given that new meaning and the etymological background of *āsava*, it is best translated as "intoxicant"—*in-toxic-ant*. The Pali-English Dictionary gives the following meanings for the word *āsava:*

1. spirit, the intoxicating extract or secretion of a tree or flower [think of the opium poppy]
2. discharge from a sore
3. technical term for certain specified ideas which intoxicate the mind (bemuddle it, befoozle it, so that it cannot rise to higher things).

Eric Kolvig gave a very excellent evening dhamma talk in Berkeley, California, back in the mid-1990s in which he said something to the effect that "saṃsāra is not a wheel—it's a drunken party in a casino. Our job is to sober up, find the exit, and get out!" What we are drunk on is the āsavas—we are

intoxicated with sense pleasures, we are intoxicated with becoming, and we are intoxicated by ignorance. And in some later suttas, the three āsavas become four with the addition of the intoxicant of views, which of course is just another flavor of ignorance.

What we find as the last step of the gradual training is that after you have concentrated your mind via the fourth jhāna,

> when one's mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, one directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the destruction of the āsavas. One understands as it really is: "This is dukkha." One understands as it really is: "This is the origin of dukkha." One understands as it really is: "This is the cessation of dukkha." One understands as it really is: "This is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha." One understands as it really is: "These are the āsavas." One understands as it really is: "This is the origin of the āsavas." One understands as it really is: "This is the cessation of the āsavas." One understands as it really is: "This is the way leading to the cessation of the āsavas." Knowing and seeing thus, one's mind is liberated from the āsava of sensual desire, from the āsava of becoming, and from the āsava of ignorance. (DN 2.99)

The standard formula for the four noble truths—existence, origin, cessation, path—is applied to both dukkha and the āsavas. There is also a simile:

> Suppose in a mountain glen there were a lake with clear water, limpid and unsullied. A man with keen sight, standing on the bank, would see oyster-shells, sand and pebbles, and shoals of fish moving about and keeping still. He would think to himself: "This is a lake with clear water limpid and unsullied, and there within it are oyster-shells, sand and pebbles, and shoals of fish moving about and keeping still." (DN 2.100)

The simile does not seem to be particularly well related to what precedes it. The simile is certainly one of "clear seeing"—insight.[1] It is possible that the formula applied to the truths and to the āsavas has usurped whatever was there originally.[2] But it also could be that what is to be seen is the general applicability of the formula: an item, its arising, its ceasing, and the path leading to its cessation.[b] The general formula is, of course, a form of dependent origination. But unmistakably this last step of the gradual training is teaching that if we have clear enough vision, that will enable us to sober up and put an end to the āsavas.[c]

During the third watch on the night of his awakening, the Buddha attained this third true knowledge—the knowledge of the destruction of the āsavas—which arises when these āsavas are uprooted: “Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute.”[3]

Again from the *Pali-English Dictionary:* “Freedom from the ‘Āsavas’ constitutes Arahantship,[d] & the fight for the extinction of these āsavas forms one of the main duties of [a human].” On becoming liberated from the āsavas, the gradual training says, “When [your mind] is liberated, the knowledge arises: ‘It is liberated.’ One understands: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further beyond this.’” The Buddha also called this liberation a visible fruit of the holy life and said, “There is no other fruit of [the holy life] higher or more sublime than this one.”[4]

a Bronkhorst (*Two Traditions*, section 7.4, p. 70) states, “The Four Dhyānas and the subsequent destruction of the intoxicants . . . occur very frequently in the canonical scriptures and already made the impression on other investigators of belonging to the oldest layers of the tradition.” In a footnote he references articles by Frauwallner, Pande, Schmithausen, Griffiths, and Heiler.

b In addition to applying the formula to dukkha and the āsavas, which occurs frequently in all four major Nikāyas, the formula is, for example, also applied to the world in SN 2.26; to the four elements in SN 14.39; to gain, honor, and praise in SN 17.27; to the five aggregates in SN 22, SN 46.30, AN 4.41, and AN 8.2; to feeling in SN 36; to the five faculties in SN 48.7; to the eye faculty and so forth in SN 48.30; to personal existence in AN 4.33; and in AN 6.63 it is applied to sensual pleasures, vedanā, perceptions, āsavas, kamma, and dukkha; in MN 9 it is applied to nutriment, aging and death, birth, becoming, clinging, craving, feeling, sense contact, the sixfold base, mentality-materiality, consciousness, fabrications, and ignorance, as well as to dukkha and the āsavas.

c Bronkhorst (*Two Traditions*, section 8.4.3, 77–79) suggests that the four noble truths are a late insertion since they neither fit in smoothly nor are necessary at this point.

d Full awakening.

22 Other Benefits of Jhāna Practice

> The *four jhānas that constitute the higher mind and provide a pleasant abiding here and now. (MN 6.9)*

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING THINGS to come from modern neuroscientific research is the discovery of neural plasticity. This refers to changes in neural pathways and synapses, which are due to changes in behavior, environment, and neural processes, as well as changes resulting from bodily injury.[1] Neuroscientist Richard Davidson writes, "When the framework of neuroplasticity is applied to meditation, we suggest that the mental training of meditation is fundamentally no different than other forms of skill acquisition that can induce plastic changes in the brain."[2] Discussing his work with meditators who are experts in what he calls "focused attention" (FA) he writes:

> The findings support the idea that, after extensive FA meditation training, minimal effort is necessary to sustain attentional focus. Expert meditators also showed less activation than novices in the amygdala during FA meditation in response to emotional sounds. Activation in this affective region correlated negatively with hours of practice in life. This finding may support the idea that advanced levels of concentration are associated with a significant decrease in emotionally reactive behaviors that are incompatible with stability of concentration. Collectively, these findings support the view that attention is a trainable skill that can be enhanced through the mental practice of FA meditation.[3]

The jhānas are certainly a strong form of FA—focused attention!

The amygdala appears to be the brain structure that is at the very center of most of the brain events associated with fear. Just an eight-week mindfulness meditation program appeared to make measurable changes in brain regions

associated with memory, sense of self, empathy, and stress. The study associated with this eight-week program found decreased gray-matter density in the amygdala.[4] This finding, along with less activation in the amygdala during focused attention meditation mentioned above, would indicate that jhāna practice would be expected to have a long-term effect of reducing the automatic fear response.

In his book *Destructive Emotions*, Daniel Goleman discusses research that shows that negative emotional states are correlated with increased activity in the right prefrontal cortex and positive emotional states are correlated with increased activity in the left prefrontal cortex. He also states that the baseline activity of the prefrontal cortex provides an "emotional set point." Furthermore, simply by spending increased amounts of time in positive emotional states and less time in negative emotional states, your emotional set point can be altered toward increased left prefrontal cortex activity—in other words, you can intentionally create a more positive emotional state as your default state.[5] This finding confirms the Buddha's assertion in the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta (MN 19.6) that "whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of one's mind."

The Buddha spoke of the jhānas as providing a "pleasant abiding here and now"[6]—in other words, since the four jhānas are primarily emotional states, they provide positive emotional abidings. Certainly from a subjective viewpoint, the first three jhānas are positive emotional states. In fact, unmistakable visual evidence provided by fMRI and EEG measurements show that all four jhānas involve increased activity in the left prefrontal cortex—even the subjectively neutral fourth jhāna shows increased left prefrontal cortex activity.[7] Although using the jhānas to move your emotional set point to be more positive is a long-term project—probably involving thousands of hours, it certainly is a nice side effect for a warm-up exercise for gaining insights.

In the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta (MN 14), the Buddha's cousin Mahānāma the Sakyan says he understands "'greed, hate, delusion [are] imperfections that defile the mind.' Yet while I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One thus, at times states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain. I have wondered, venerable sir, what state is still unabandoned by me internally, owing to which at times these states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain."

The Buddha replies, "When a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and despair, and that the danger in them is still more, and he attains to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from

unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, then he is no longer attracted to sensual pleasures." In other words, understanding the drawbacks of greed, hate, and delusion is not enough; the experience of rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, are needed as well. This higher pleasure is available in the first and second jhānas, and the higher jhānas provide "something more peaceful than that." Thus the jhānas serve as an antidote to getting lost in the pursuit of worldly pleasures.

In the Naḷakapāna Sutta (MN 68.6), the Buddha similarly points out how jhāna practice overcomes the five hindrances (including covetousness, often used as a synonym for sensual pleasure), as well as other unwholesome states such as discontent and weariness.

In the second "sermon" in the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38.28-40),[a] the Buddha teaches the gradual training up through the four jhānas. Post-jhāna, one abandons favoring and opposing, and whatever vedanā one experiences, one does not delight in that vedanā, welcome it, or remain holding to it. Being thus free from craving, one is free from dukkha.

So besides the jhānas being a way to prepare your mind for insight practice, they can also have the following benefits as well:

- reduce effort necessary to sustain attentional focus,
- decrease emotionally reactive behaviors,
- reduce your automatic fear response,
- move your emotional set point in the positive direction,
- provide pleasure more desirable than worldly pleasures, and hence
- provide an antidote to sensual craving,
- provide a pleasant abiding here and now.

a MN 38 is composed of two "sermons" on the destruction of craving (taṇhā). The first (MN 38.1–25) is about Sati, who thinks his consciousness transmigrates (an example of bhavataṇhā); there is a "bridge" at MN 38.26–27; and finally there is the second "sermon" on sensual craving (kāmataṇhā).

Afterword

I HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED YOUR TOUR through the jhānas as described in the suttas of the Pali canon. These concentration states are skills that are indeed learnable by serious lay practitioners of the buddhadhamma as well as by modern monks and nuns. Facility with the jhānas will certainly enhance your insight practice and perhaps bring a new feeling of excitement to your meditation practice. They also provide a number of positive, long-term side effects as discussed in the previous chapter.

Not everyone who undertakes jhāna practice becomes proficient in these skills, but the only way to find out if they are something that works for you is to try learning them. Just remember: it is certainly much easier to learn the jhānas while on a longer silent meditation retreat. And it helps to have someone with whom you can discuss your experiences as you attempt to enter these states.

There is quite a bit more that can be said about the jhānas. I have included several jhāna-related essays in the following appendices. Hopefully what is there deepens your understanding of these incredibly useful mind states. You can find additional jhāna-related essays at http://rc.leighb.com/more.

Also, please remember: this is just one person's understanding of the jhānas. There are many more interpretations out there. Furthermore, my understanding of the jhānas has changed over time. Had I written this book five years earlier, it would be quite different. Nothing stays the same; everything in the universe is in flux—especially human ideas and understanding. But what is presented here is based on a two-and-a-half-thousand-year-old tradition, and it is both practical and learnable.

May your journey on the spiritual path be of great fruit and great benefit to you and to all beings!

APPENDIX 1:

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need exceptional powers of concentration to learn the jhānas?
No. You do need some skill at concentration, but it doesn't have to be exceptional. I have had a number of students in their first interview say to me something like, "I don't know why I'm here on a jhāna retreat—I don't have very good concentration." But yet, an interview or two later they come in and clearly are experiencing one or more jhānas. Remember "concentration" is not the best translation of *samādhi;* much better is "indistractability." Really the only way to find out if you have enough indistractability is to come on a retreat where jhānas are being taught and see what happens. Just be sure to come with no expectations !

I've heard that one can become addicted to the jhānas. Is this true?
It is possible—but certainly it's not something to worry about. In Western civilization, students have their famous short attention span. At first, they get high on the jhānas—it's wonderful! Then they get high—it's wonderful. Then they get high—and it's nice. Then they get high—and it's "been there; done that; what's next?" What's next is insight practice. A skilled jhāna teacher is always carefully checking to see if a student has become overly enamored with the jhānic states and if so, pushes the student to do insight practice in the post-jhānic state of mind. Once the insights start rolling in, the student will have found something far more interesting and rewarding than just getting high. Problem solved.

This is not to say that someone practicing jhānas without the guidance of a competent teacher might not become "addicted" to the jhānic states, although the word *addicted* is quite a stretch since there are absolutely no withdrawal symptoms. But it is true that someone could waste their time just getting superconcentrated and never use their concentrated mind to gain insights. But generally people who do wind up just playing in the jhānas for months or even years on end do begin to wonder, "There's got to be more to this than just getting

high!” Hopefully they find someone who can help them channel their concentration skill toward investigating the nature of reality.

Are there people who should not attempt jhāna practice or for whom jhāna practice would be very difficult?

My usual answer to this is that if the jhānas were dangerous, I’d be dead by now. That said, jhāna practice is contraindicated for someone with an untreated tendency toward mania. It seems that frequent, repeated experiences of pīti and/or sukha can lead to an onset of a manic episode. This is thankfully very rare—occurring in less than a tenth of a percent of the over one thousand students I have worked with. Also, as mentioned in chapter 3, “Entering the Jhānas,” practice with strong pīti might be contraindicated for someone prone to seizures.

I have had students who were being treated for bipolar disorder and for schizophrenia who had no problems—but their medication left their effect so flat that they were not able to enter a jhāna. So I can say that some psychotropic medications seem to not be compatible with jhāna practice. But of course, for those who need such medication, not taking that medication is not an option either!

I have had a large number of students who were taking medication for depression. They seem to have a slightly more difficult time learning the jhānas, but antidepressants do not seem to be a significant problem.

If the jhānas are so central to the Buddha’s teachings, why are they so seldom taught today?

It seems after the Buddha’s death, the monks began a slow process of redefining just what constitutes these states. There are hints of this starting to happen in some of the suttas that seem to be very late compositions. See the information about MN 43 and MN 111 mentioned in chapter 12, “First Jhāna.” When we look at the jhānas as described in the Abhidhamma, which was composed some one to two hundred or more years after the Buddha’s death, what we find being described are states of much deeper absorption. Vitakka and vicāra by that time had been redefined to no longer mean “thinking” but rather “initial and sustained attention on the meditation object,” and ekaggata had become an additional factor of the first jhāna. By the time of the *Visuddhimagga*, some eight hundred plus years after the Buddha’s death, the jhānas had become redefined to such an extent that it was extremely difficult to learn them. Unfortunately this *Visuddhimagga* description of what constitutes a jhāna persists, for the most part, into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Since the number of people who could actually attain *Visuddhimagga*-style

jhānas was quite small, the teaching of jhānas became more and more neglected in favor of "dry insight"—insight meditation without the preliminary jhāna practice. Dry insight practice is doable by almost anyone since it only requires momentary concentration (khaṇika-samādhi).

But even having recovered what the Buddha and his monastics were practicing does not make teaching jhānas an easy task. Students in the West tend to come on short retreats (yes, ten days is quite short when compared to the annual three-month rainy-season retreat for monastics), often bringing expectations—realistic or not, but always hindering the learning of jhānas. Effectively teaching jhānas requires a good bit of one-on-one interview time in addition to providing a clear set of instructions as a starting point. It is quite a lot of work for the teachers and the students, and even students who work very hard are not guaranteed to experience any jhānas.

It's quite a shame that the jhānas have become so neglected. Ayya Khema's teacher, the Venerable Matara Sri Ñanarama Mahathera, after confirming that Ayya was indeed doing the jhānas correctly, added, "And furthermore you must teach them, they are in danger of becoming a lost art."[1]

It says in the suttas that the Buddha-to-be rejected the jhānas he learned from his two teachers.[2] Why would he return to practicing them?

The Buddha-to-be's teachers taught that what we refer to as the seventh and eighth jhānas were the goal of the spiritual path. Master Gotama understood that neither the seventh nor eighth jhāna answered his questions or lead to the end of dukkha, so he left each of his teachers. He then tried austerities practices, but he determined, "By this racking practice of austerities I have not attained any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to awakening?"[3]

He then remembered an incident from his childhood where he had spontaneously entered the first jhāna when seated in the cool shade of a rose apple tree while his father was working. He wondered, "Could that be the path to awakening?" Upon more reflection he decided, "That is indeed the path to awakening."[4] In other words, he realized that the jhānas were part of the path, not the goal. He then used them as a preliminary practice[5] before gaining the insight that led to his awakening and becoming the Buddha.

So he rejected the jhānas as the goal and only later recognized that they were a very useful part of the path to the goal.

What was the reason for this redefinition of jhānas away from how the Buddha understood and practiced them?

We don't really know. My best guess is that the forest monks in the generations after the Buddha's death basically had nothing much to do but sit around and meditate. With this deeply dedicated practice, some of them discovered these deeper states of absorption but failed to recognize them as not being what was talked about in the suttas. However, clearly these deeper states were deemed useful since they became the de facto understanding of the jhānas. These states then needed to be somehow explained by the descriptions given in the suttas. The first of these absorption states certainly had one-pointedness as a quality, so that was added as a "factor" of the first jhāna by simply stating it was implied, even though it is not mentioned in the sutta description. Of course that meant *vitakka* and *vicāra* could no longer mean "thinking" since thinking is incompatible with one-pointedness, so these two words were redefined to mean "initial and sustained attention to the meditation object."

All this has had the unfortunate side effects of not only failing to understand what the Buddha was experiencing and teaching, but also of redefining jhānic concentration to such an extreme depth that almost no one could experience it or use it. The sutta jhānas, which far more people could attain and use, fell into disfavor and were mostly forgotten. This is really a shame since the Buddha's genius in discovering that these states serve wonderfully as a prelude to insight practice was then lost.

Why are no detailed instructions for the jhānas given anywhere in the suttas?

In the preface, I mentioned that the jhānas do not lend themselves to "book learning": they are much more effectively learned one on one with a teacher rather than from only reading (or hearing) instructions. So there would not really be all that much point for the Buddha to go into the details of learning the jhānas in a sutta—which, remember, is a discourse he spoke to an individual or a group. If someone needed to learn the jhānas, it seems quite likely they would be encouraged to study with a teacher who could give them tailor-made instructions as they progressed.

Do the jhānas always arise in 1-2-3-4 order, or can they arise out of order, even skipping some jhānas?

The jhānas do not always arise in order. It's not all that uncommon for someone to generate only mild pīti and therefore not have a really distinct experience of the first jhāna. Now technically, as outlined in the chapter 13, "Second Jhāna," they are actually in the first jhāna with minimum pīti until the thinking subsides and their mind can become unified around the sukha.

Occasionally someone gets no pīti at all but does get strong enough sukha that

they are able to go directly into the third jhāna. And it is also not unheard of for someone to wind up going directly into the fourth jhāna. There is no real problem with these as starting points, although it will require more time in whatever is the initial jhāna to let the concentration deepen and really stabilize.

It's also not uncommon that in trying to move from a lower numbered jhāna to the next higher numbered one, someone skips a jhāna. The sequences 1-2-4 and 1-3-4 are not uncommon. It is also not uncommon for someone to go from the fifth jhāna to the seventh when trying to learn the sixth. Much more rare is the sequence 5-6-8, but it does happen.

If someone frequently experienced one of the jhānas other than the first as a child, it is quite common for them to initially enter at that jhāna rather than at the first jhāna. They also seem to be a bit more likely to skip the preceding jhāna when initially trying to learn it and go right into the jhāna they are more familiar with.

In general none of this is a problem. To learn the "missing" jhāna(s)—which is a good idea—it usually works best to go past the missing jhāna and then try to go "up" to the previous numbered jhāna. By spending time in the jhāna after the missing one, you deepen your concentration such that you will have plenty for stabilizing the missing one when you find it. And the transition back to a lower-numbered jhāna is usually quite easy compared to trying to find the next higher-numbered one if you have never experienced it.

When I get really concentrated, my mouth seems to fill up with saliva. What should I do about that?

This is a very commonly reported problem. Normally you swallow automatically whenever you need to without noticing it. But when you get really quiet/concentrated, the act of swallowing becomes this huge thing compared to the ongoing quiet. Therefore, you basically forego swallowing and your mouth fills with saliva. You have two choices—drool or swallow. Swallowing will indeed interrupt your quiet and concentration—but not for very long. Like having to move when a pain becomes too intense, if you decide to swallow, notice the intention to swallow, swallow, and then go right back to what you were doing—it clearly is working. The good news is that this seems to work itself out after about three to six months of concentration practice. When you get skilled in the jhāna, you'll probably find that you swallow as part of moving from one jhāna to the next.

How did your teacher Ayya Khema learn the jhānas?

She taught herself! All she had were the early translations of the suttas from the

late 1800s and early 1900s plus a very good translation of the *Visuddhimagga*. She had a very keen mind and always wanted to understand exactly what was happening. I assume, but don't know for sure, that she began stumbling into the early jhānas and, by reading the suttas and the *Visuddhimagga*, figured out that they were jhānas. She would certainly have read all she could find on these states, which would have probably been nothing outside of what is in the suttas and the *Visuddhimagga*. In her autobiography[6] she mentions sitting in meditation all night during the full moon and deciding she was going to find the immaterial jhānas—and she did. After she had developed some skill in all eight jhānas, she sought a jhāna master who could confirm them. As mentioned above, the Venerable Matara Sri Ñanarama Mahathera confirmed that she was indeed doing the jhānas correctly and had her begin teaching them.

Do the references to pīti and sukha in the 16 steps of mindfulness of breathing[7] refer to the jhānas?

There are certainly those who would argue that steps 5–12 are referring to the jhānas. On the other hand, people who understand the jhānas in terms of what is described in the *Visuddhimagga* would argue that these steps do not refer to the jhānas—this is because their understanding of the jhānas is of states of full absorption, and if you are fully absorbed, there is no way you can be aware of your breathing.

One thing that is quite obvious is that steps 5–12 do involve taking the mind to a deeper level of concentration. But it doesn't really seem likely that these steps refer to the jhānas, at least based on the qualities and the order of the qualities mentioned. In step 5–12, the order of the qualities mentioned is "pīti, sukha, experiencing the mental formation, tranquilizing, experiencing the mind, gladdening (*abhippamodayaṃ*), concentrating and liberating" (MN 118.18). In chapter 16, "The Jhāna Summary," and in the Upanisā Sutta (SN 12.23), the order is gladness (pāmojja), pīti, tranquility, sukha, concentration. Notice that in these latter two obvious jhāna references, gladdening comes first, not after the pīti and sukha. Tranquility comes between pīti and sukha, not after them; liberating the mind isn't even mentioned.

Certainly one could argue that the first 4 steps of mindfulness of breathing can be used to generate access concentration, and the next 8 steps deepen that concentration, while the last 4 steps are clearly insight steps. But it also seems like there are valuable insights to be gained in all 16 steps.

It appears that these 16 steps of mindfulness of breathing are another method for working with concentration and insight that is somewhat different from that described in the gradual training, which includes the jhānas. But there doesn't

seem to be enough evidence to settle this discussion, so it will likely continue.

For an excellent detailed exploration of the 16 steps of mindfulness of breathing, please see *Mindfulness with Breathing—A Manual for Serious Beginners* by Ajahn Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Wisdom Publications, 1996).

Are the last four factors of the seven factors of awakening the same as the jhānas?

The *Seven Factors of Awakening* are

1. mindfulness (sati)
2. investigation of phenomena (dhamma-vicaya)
3. energy (viriya)
4. rapture (pīti)
5. tranquility (passaddhi)
6. concentration (samādhi)
7. equanimity (upekkha)

It certainly is the case that moving through the four jhānas will generate rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Although there are teachers who have claimed that the last four factors are identical with the four jhānas, I personally think it is a bit of a stretch. But given that right concentration, the eighth step on the noble eightfold path, is defined as the four jhānas,[8] it certainly seems that in order to perfect the seven factors of awakening, having skill in the four jhānas is going to be extremely helpful. And of course skill in the jhānas generates a mind that can much more easily be mindful and more deeply investigate phenomena.

Are the jhānas necessary for awakening?

It certainly seems that they are not necessary for the first stage of awakening, called *stream-entry. There* are numerous suttas where the Buddha gives a dhamma talk and one or more people experience the first level of awakening. It also appears that many of these people were lay people with no background in meditation—among those who experience stream-entry upon hearing a talk from the Buddha are both a king and a leper. And it seems that even today people experience what seems to be stream-entry without ever practicing the jhānas.

As for whether or not the jhānas are required for full awakening—arahatship—well, you can find plenty of evidence in the suttas to prove that they certainly are required and also that they certainly are not required. I think the only way

this question can be decided for full awakening is to do a survey of those who are undoubtedly fully awakened—but unfortunately people who are unmistakably arahats seem to be in short supply these days.

What is certain is that if you have the necessary concentration skills, the jhānas are definitely helpful on the spiritual path. Equally obvious from the suttas is that the way that the jhānas are most helpful is to use them as a preliminary practice for sharpening your mind prior to doing insight practice—that is, investigate the way things really are with a jhānically enhanced mind.

What are the relationships among the Pali words samatha and samādhi, vipassanā and paññā, and jhāna?

We sometimes hear about "samatha and vipassanā" (e.g., as types of meditation) and about "samādhi and paññā" (e.g., as parts of sīla, samādhi, and paññā). We can define these words as follows:

- samatha—calm
- samādhi—indistractability, concentration
- vipassanā—insight, an understood experience
- paññā—wisdom

Samatha is the Pali word for "calm." Any type of meditation whose primary aim is to generate a calm, collected mind can be referred to as "samatha meditation." All of the methods for generating access concentration discussed in appendix 3 are samatha practices. There are even modern techniques, such as counting sheep to help you fall asleep, which could be referred to as "samatha practice."

When doing any form of samatha meditation, when the mind collects on an object and becomes unlikely to become distracted, then samādhi (indistractability, concentration) has been established. Samādhi is *samatha* par excellence. Samādhi is used to generate the jhānas; then moving through the jhānas will deepen the samādhi.

Once the mind has become concentrated, it can be turned to investigating the nature of reality. This hopefully gives insight (vipassanā) into "things as they really are" in that you have an "understood experience"[a] of what's actually happening. Wisdom (paññā) arises when the insights are integrated and provide a foundation so that you can operate in harmony with reality.

So first you establish samatha (calm); then deepen that calm until it becomes samādhi (indistractability, concentration). Use this samādhi to generate the jhānas, which will deepen the samādhi. Then upon exiting the jhānas, turn your concentrated mind to investigating the nature of reality so that you can gain insight (vipassanā), which can be integrated to become wisdom (paññā).

How much concentration is required for jhāna?

In Buddhism in the twenty-first century, there is much discussion about the role of jhāna practice in following the Buddha's path. There are those who are quite opposed to any role for the jhānas—though clearly they have not paid careful, open-minded attention to the early teachings in the suttas of the Pali canon. But even among those who feel jhāna practice is important, there is quite a heated discussion as to exactly how much concentration is required for an experience to be classified as a jhāna. Not surprisingly, most jhāna teachers claim that the amount of concentration they teach is the correct amount, and any less concentration is not real jhāna, and any more concentration is simply indulging and a waste of time.

When I was first practicing jhānas, I spoke with a highly respected teacher in the vipassanā community about my practice. That person gave me truly excellent advice: "We don't really know what the Buddha was practicing, but what you are doing seems to be fine." I had not actually considered that there was any other way than what I was doing; I had just assumed I was doing the one and only correct way since I was gaining so many valuable insights during my insight practice periods using my jhānically concentrated mind.

The question "What was the Buddha's understanding of jhāna practice?" continued to rumble around in my head over the years, especially as I learned that there were a number of competing interpretations of the descriptions of the jhānas found in the suttas. Then in 2006, I had an experience that seemed to shed light on that question. I was attending a month-long retreat with the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw at the Insight Meditation Society's Forest Refuge.

The primary access method that Sayadaw teaches is mindfulness of breathing —ānāpānasati. The initial instructions for ānāpānasati from Sayadaw were to learn to follow the breath for half an hour without getting distracted. Since I had been practicing ānāpānasati for over 20 years in one form or another, this was not a difficult thing for me to do. When I reported that I could do so at my next interview, Sayadaw asked me to sit longer—like three or four hours per sitting.

Needless to say, such long sittings quickly built my concentration. And since, for nearly 20 years, I had been using ānāpānasati concentration to access pīti, I began having very strong bursts of pīti. Luckily, these bursts only lasted ten or so

seconds—if they had lasted much longer, my head would have probably popped off, the shaking was so strong. I was not doing anything to induce the pīti—it was showing up on its own after I got really concentrated. I reported this to Sayadaw, and he called it "gross pīti" and said it was not helpful and to not do that.

I found that I could prevent the pīti from arising if I was very careful to not smile—I had to keep a very neutral expression on my face—and not get distracted into anything "pleasurable." Yet I could feel the pīti in the background tingling away pretty much all the time; certainly anytime I stopped and looked for it, it was there. But I could prevent the strong outbursts of "gross pīti."

Please note: the following is *not* a description of the jhānas as taught by Venerable Pa Auk—for that see the web page "Visuddhimagga Jhānas" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/Visuddhimagga_Jhanas.htm. These are just my extracurricular explorations. Mostly I concentrated (pun intended) on Sayadaw's ānāpānasati practice. But sometimes after sitting for three or four hours, if I still had energy and my body was willing, I would let the pīti arise (all I had to do was smile for a minute or so) and go off exploring the jhānas as I had learned them from Venerable Ayya Khema.

The pīti would arise and flood my body, and I would experience severe shaking for ten seconds or so. This would calm down, and I would find myself in a state of extreme happiness: sukha. The sukha was huge, and I was intently focused on it. I wouldn't say I was totally absorbed; I could still hear the birds singing outside my window if I turned my mind to them, but I was completely indistractable. My attention was not going anywhere! There was no effort at all involved in being in this state—it was simply my current state of being. So I would sit there with no notion of how long I was staying in the state, just thoroughly enjoying being so happy that I was grinning almost big enough to break my face. From time to time, more bursts of pīti would arise. At first they were as strong and long as the initial burst, but over time they would be less frequent and less intense. I would stay in this state for (I'm guessing) about 15 minutes—with no effort on my part—just sitting and experiencing.

So where was I? Well, this state was certainly familiar from practicing the jhānas as I learned them from Ayya Khema—but far more stable and intense. It's what she called the second jhāna. But what do the suttas say? Well, they describe the first jhāna having four qualities:

- vitakka—thinking
- vicāra—examining

- pīti—glee, rapture
- sukha—happiness/joy

The last two—pīti and sukha—are said to be born of “seclusion” (from the hindrances). Now, the second jhāna arises with the subsiding of the vitakka and the vicāra and also is described as having four qualities:

- sampasādana—inner tranquility (or inner assurance, depending on the translation)
- ekodi-bhavam—unification of mind
- pīti—glee, rapture
- sukha—happiness/joy

The last two—pīti and sukha—are said to be born of “concentration.” Well, I certainly was concentrated when I entered this state. And there was no real thinking—I was just there with my calm mind focused in a unified way on the sukha. So I would say I was in the second jhāna—skipping the first because of the strong concentration, which propelled me directly into the second.

As mentioned earlier, in some suttas, the Buddha elaborates that one “drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one’s body with the pīti and sukha born of concentration so that there is no part of one’s body not filled with pīti and sukha” (DN 2.79). Well, there was no action necessary on my part—I was drenched, steeped, saturated, and suffused with the pīti and sukha. It felt like I was immersed in a bowl of sukha; I was completely filled with it, and it totally surrounded me. This wasn’t “Oh, I should move the pīti from my chest into my legs”; this was dunked and held under. This experience much more closely matched the sutta description than I’d ever experienced before.

So I’d hang out in this second jhāna for a while and then maybe think to move on to the third jhāna. But it was not within my power to intentionally make that move. I had to wait until the pīti faded away on its own—which could take a while. I’m guessing it was over a 15-minute span from the time of the initial burst of strong pīti until it faded away and didn’t return. At that time, the sukha would calm down and the “break-your-face grin” would become more of a nice grin. And everything would become very unmoving, very still. I was now in a calmer, steadier, and still quite happy place—the third jhāna, I presume. There

was still no need to intentionally focus on the sukha—it just was there, and my attention was riveted on it.

Eventually, the happiness would fade out, and I'd be in a very nice neutral state of mind—very calm, very still. And my visual field would go all white. This state would only last a minute or so; then a sinking feeling would appear. I would just go with the feeling of sinking down, down, down. Eventually the sinking would stop, and I'd be in what I would say was the fourth jhāna. The energy level had certainly decreased, but I did not experience the pronounced slumping I often encounter in the fourth jhāna when I enter it with less concentration; I sagged slightly rather than slumped.

My visual field remained white during this sinking and settling phase. The description of the fourth jhāna sometimes adds, "One sits suffusing one's body with a clear, bright mind" (DN 2.83). Definitely my visual field was bright white, and that brightness seems to extend to the non-visual aspects of my experience—there was a brightness and clarity to the whole experience.

The simile given for the fourth jhāna is a "man covered from the head down by a white cloth" (DN 2.84). This fourth-jhāna experience was like sitting outside on a bright sunny day with a white sheet thrown over me—except there was no sense of touch, and my eyes were closed. But everything seemed close in and bright white. For the first time, I had a deep appreciation of how extremely accurate the simile for the fourth jhāna actually is—it really captures the experience.

As mentioned in chapter 7 on the fourth jhāna, at the time of the Buddha, after the monks and nuns finished their alms rounds, they would eat their midday meal, which would be at around ten or eleven o'clock in the morning. Then they would "go for the day's abiding"[9] and meditate until evening. Since they had not grown up with chairs, they had the capacity to sit cross-legged for an extended period of time. So if they were sitting for multiple hours at a time over a six- or seven-hour period, they were far more likely to experience a very deep level of concentration. By the time they entered the fourth jhāna, their concentration was deep enough that the simile with its white cloth indeed captured the pure, bright mind they were experiencing.

So it turns out we do have enough information in the suttas to set minimum and maximum bounds on how much concentration the composers of the suttas[b] were experiencing in their jhāna practice. The maximum strength would be limited by the phrase "One drenches, steeps, saturates, and suffuses one's body." Clearly in the first four jhānas, there cannot be such a strong a level of concentration that you lose touch with your body. Thus in the suttas, the jhānas cannot be full absorption since in full absorption there is no body awareness at

all.

The minimum strength of concentration for the composers of the suttas would be that concentration has to be strong enough concentration to generate the pure bright mind with its bright white visual field in the fourth jhāna.

So if we want to have a strictly sutta-based answer to the question “How much concentration is required for jhāna?” the answer would be at least enough to generate the pure bright mind of the fourth jhāna and not so much as to lose touch with your body. This information gets us about as close as we can get to answering the question “What was the Buddha’s understanding of the jhānas?”

But remember: the Buddha was an incredibly practical teacher. I think he would agree that any amount of concentration that managed to enhance your investigation of reality would be better than no additional concentration. So whether or not you can spend the hours in access concentration sufficient to generate the bright white visual field and the pure bright mind of the fourth jhāna, generate whatever concentration you can as a prelude to your insight practice!

As mentioned earlier, I have been accused of teaching “Jhāna Lite.” Well, certainly what I teach is “lite” compared to what is described in the *Visuddhimagga*—but the depth of concentration described there, since it involves full absorption in even the first jhāna, does exceed the upper bound of what is taught in the suttas. But what I teach would be considered “lite” compared even to the sutta description. However, what I teach is what a lay person can learn in a ten-day retreat. And if they learn it well and apply it as a warm-up for their insight practice, they will benefit greatly from even that level of increased concentration. And if they want to further increase the depth of concentration experienced in the jhānas, then all that is necessary is to increase the amount of time spent in access concentration.

Really the question “How much concentration is required for jhāna?” is not the best question to ask. The real question is “How much concentration can I generate as a prelude to my insight practice given the constraints of my life?” It’s much better to generate a so-called lite version of the jhānas than to throw up your hands and not enhance your concentration at all because of not being able to experience some deeper idealized version. The methods described in this book do teach a way to enhanced concentration that is accessible and highly beneficial when applied to “seeing things as they really are.”

a Ayya Khema frequently defined an *insight* as “an understood experience.”
b The usual assumption that the suttas accurately reflect what the Buddha and his monks and nuns were practicing is just that—an assumption.

APPENDIX 2:

Helpful Things to Do at the Beginning and End of Each Meditation Period

THERE ARE FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO at the beginning of a meditation period that will help you get settled and will prepare your mind for meditation. There are also five additional things you can do at the end of a meditation period that will help consolidate the gains you have made during that period.

Five Things to Do at the Beginning of Meditation

It is very helpful after you get seated in your comfortable, upright posture to generate some *gratitude*—gratitude toward your teachers who have taught you the dhamma, gratitude for the life circumstance that enables you to undertake this period of meditation practice, gratitude for all the millions of people who have had a hand in preserving the Buddha's dhamma for two and half thousand years, gratitude to the Buddha for finding and showing the way, gratitude for anything else that you are currently grateful for. This begins to settle your mind into a positive state, which will be helpful for entering the jhānas. Also current neuroscience research has shown that gratitude practice begins the process of shutting down the so-called default-mode network, which is responsible for many of our distractions.

A second preliminary is to get in touch with your *motivation*. Why are you doing this practice? Whatever it is, getting it clear in your mind hopefully will inspire you. Then work up some *determination*—not determination to get anything, just determination to do your very best to use this time as wisely as possible. Get as strong a sense of that as you can; then let it go. It is not useful to begin your practice with a tight mind. But a few moments of working up some determination will have a residual effect that will carry over into your access meditation, when you begin that.

At the beginning of every meditation period, you should always do some *mettā* (loving-kindness) practice—always for yourself, and additionally for

others, if you wish. Mettā practice enhances the positive mind state generated moments earlier by the gratitude practice, as well as starting to generate some concentration. If mettā meditation is not something you like doing, it is still required that you do at least a little at the beginning of every sitting. You don't have to feel anything; you just have to remind yourself that it really is OK to be well and happy, and that it would be nice if others that you know are also well and happy. Don't feel you have to do this mettā practice for an extended period—30 seconds is fine. And don't feel you have to send mettā to everyone you know—the nice people and the difficult people. It's OK to just do mettā for yourself (always required!) and for a few people you really like. Of course doing more than 30 seconds of mettā and sending it to more individuals and various groups, including "all living beings everywhere," is also fine; it's just not required as part of this preliminary. For more information on mettā practice, see appendix 3, "Access Concentration Methods."

The last of the five things to do at the start of a meditation period is only useful if you are using mindfulness of breathing as your access method; otherwise, just skip it. There is a gatha (saying) from Thich Nhat Hanh: "Breathing in, I calm body and mind. Breathing out, I smile."[1] This is exactly what you need to do to generate access concentration using mindfulness of breathing. Don't take the saying too literally—just breathe in and out and smile and get calm.

Five Things to Do at the End of Meditation

The five things to do at the end of a meditation period begin with *recapitulation*—what did you do, and how did you get there? This includes remembering what your posture was at the beginning of the period, what it was like to do the five preliminaries mentioned above, what you used for your access method, how you knew you were in access, how long you stayed in access, what was the pleasant sensation that you switched to, what was it like to be with that pleasant sensation, how did the jhāna begin to manifest (if one did), how you responded, and so forth. In fact it can be helpful to remember things that you did before coming to meditate: Had you just eaten? Had you just come back from a walk? Did you read something inspiring?

If you have a meditation the likes of which you would like to have again, it is helpful to know the factors that went into generating that experience. So remember anything that might be relevant. Then when you meditate the next time, try, to the best of your ability, to repeat those factors. You are not going to be able to repeat the experience—that's over and gone. But you will have a better chance of having new experiences similar to the previous one if you have

some idea of what you did to generate that previous experience. Not everything you remember preceding some meditation experience is going to be relevant—just keep doing the recapitulation after each sitting, and eventually you'll discover the important contributing factors. This recapitulation is also useful if you have a meditation session the likes of which you never want to have again—remember all the things that happened prior to and during that session, and see if you can figure out which one(s) might have been detrimental.

The second thing to do at the end of a sitting is reflect on *impermanence*—all those high, but mundane, concentration states are now gone; they too are impermanent. The Buddha said, "It is better to live a single day perceiving how things rise and fall than to live a century not perceiving this."[2] The jhānas are impermanent, just like all the other things of saṃsāra. Directly experiencing this is insight into impermanence, one of the three "marks of existence," which constitute the primary areas of exploration that lead to liberating insight.

The third reflection is *insight:* Did you get any insights? What were they? Insights are understood experiences. Some insights are personal; the deepest ones are about the impermanent, ultimately unsatisfying, empty nature of the universe. If you gained any insight, it is very helpful to keep bringing it to mind. Insights really only have a transformative capacity if you can keep them fresh in your memory. Remembering them, if you gained any, at the end of a sitting is the way to begin to keep them fresh. Otherwise they seem to slink back there with your long-forgotten high school foreign language and don't resurface until you have another experience that reminds you, "Oh, yes, I knew that—but I forgot."

The meditation practice you do has effects beyond just you personally. Recognizing this is quite helpful and a good way to remember it is to *dedicate the merit* from this sitting for the liberation of all beings. You can just think something like, "May the merit from this meditation period be for the liberation of all beings everywhere." This helps to counteract any selfishness ("What a great meditator I am!") and puts you in touch with the fact that we all are interrelated and in this together.

The chapter on the preliminaries mentioned that unrelenting *mindfulness* was an extremely important practice to undertake while learning the jhānas. Therefore, just before you get up from your seat, resolve to be mindful as you arise and go about your activities. Continuous mindfulness is very difficult—you need all the help you can get. So make it a habit to remind yourself to be mindful as the last thing at the end of every period of formal meditation.

All of these are just suggestions. If you already have nice preliminary and postmeditation routines, feel free to stick with them, or modify them with any of the above suggestions that seem useful. It really does help to have a way to get

settled before starting to meditate, and it certainly helps to do whatever you can to consolidate any gains you've made during a meditation period.

APPENDIX 3:

Access Concentration Methods

THE *Visuddhimagga* mentions thirty different meditation methods for generating access concentration.[1] Most any practice that generates a calm (samatha) mind can be used to generate access concentration. Below, several access methods are described in some detail.

Mindfulness of Breathing

Probably the most frequently used method of generating access concentration is the practice known as *ānāpānasati*.[a] *The* first word, *ānāpāna*, means "in-breath and out-breath," and the word *sati* means "mindfulness." The practice is therefore "mindfulness of breathing."

The description of mindfulness of breathing begins, "One sits down crossed legged, holds one's body erect and sets up mindfulness before oneself."[2] Sitting cross-legged was a lot easier in the time of the Buddha because people didn't often have chairs, so they habitually sat cross-legged on a mat or the floor. Many of us have lost that ability, so it's perfectly OK to kneel on a bench or sit in a chair. What you want to do is to be able to put your body in a position where you can just leave it relatively comfortable for the length of the meditation period. If it's too uncomfortable, you'll have aversion in your mind, which is an unwholesome state that will keep you out of the jhāna.

You want to sit upright, especially if you are doing mindfulness of breathing. The upright posture helps keep you awake, and it also makes the breathing happen more easily, and therefore it is easier to be mindful of it. After you have settled in, put your attention on the physical sensations associated with your breathing. Pay attention to your breath at your nostrils if you can. Paying attention at the nostrils is more difficult than at the belly or the chest—you have to concentrate more because it's a more subtle object. If you can successfully concentrate on the breath at the nostrils, you have more concentration than if you successfully concentrate on the breath at the belly. Since you need a strong level of concentration to enter the jhāna, it's helpful to work with the more subtle

object of the breath at the nostrils.

The phrase *parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā*, often translated as “one sets up mindfulness before oneself,” would literally be translated as “one sets up mindfulness at the mouth/entrance.” The word *mukha* means “mouth” or “entrance”—think of the mouth of a cave. This would mean at the entrance of the nostrils if breathing through your nose, or at the lips if breathing through your mouth (e.g., if you had a cold). This has later been interpreted to mean either at the nostrils or on the area between the nose and the upper lip. If you are going to pay attention at the nostrils, it can be done right at the opening or just a little bit inside—but don’t try to go in too deep; stay near the entrance. But it’s really just where you feel the breath. You are to notice the tactile sensations associated with breathing: the coolness as the air comes in, the warmth as it goes out, or however you experience it.

If you have been paying attention to the rise and fall of the belly or the chest for many years, you may find it very difficult to change to paying attention at the nostrils. Just try it and see what it’s like—see if you can make the switch. If indeed you can make the switch, it’s actually going to be very useful because when you put your attention at the nostrils, you’re signaling yourself, “concentrate”; when you put your breath at the belly or chest, you’re signaling yourself, “do insight practice,” and that can be quite useful. If you find that trying to make the switch is too problematic, go back to whatever you’re used to, but be patient before doing so. It is probably going to take working with the breath at the nostrils on a silent retreat at least for a full day—or more—to learn what it’s like and successfully make the switch.

There are some aids that you can use that can be very helpful when you are trying to get settled. They won’t take you all the way to access concentration, but when you first sit down to meditate, you might find that your mind is all over the place. To help you overcome these initial distractions, you can try one of these aids.

The first aid is counting. Traditionally you count one on the in-breath, one on the out-breath; two on the in-breath, two on the out-breath; up to ten. If you get to ten, go back to one. If you get lost, go back to one. That will work, but an even more effective way of counting is to count the gap between the out-breath and the next in-breath. You breathe in, you breathe out—one. Breathe in, breathe out—two. Think of tossing the number in the gap. Most people find they are more likely to get lost on the out-breath. The air goes out and so do you. If you are really going to be fully present to toss the number right in that gap, you’ve got to be paying careful attention. And you should count only up to eight. It’s easy to go on automatic from one to ten and then back to one. Eight is an

unaccustomed stopping place; thus you have to pay more careful attention. So count only up to eight. If you get to eight, go back to one. If you get lost, go back to one. There are no prizes for getting to eight. If you get lost, it's no big deal. If you're not sure, just go back to one—it doesn't matter. You want to make sure to get the number in the gap, not at the end of the out-breath. You'll find that as you begin to lose your focus, you'll start counting the end of the out-breath, rather than the gap. If you notice that, it's no big deal; just pay more careful attention and toss the next number in the gap.

The second possible aid is helpful if you are very visual. You can visualize an ocean wave coming in on the in-breath and then going out on the out-breath. Another wave coming in on the next in-breath, going out on the out-breath. Some people find this works to quiet the distractions for them.

A third aid is to use a word or a pair of words. If you use a single word, it should have two syllables, like the traditional *buddho*. So think "bud" on the in-breath, "dho" on the out-breath: "bud," "dho," "bud," "dho." Another possibility is to use two one-syllable words. You could breathe in "peace" and breath out "love"—"peace," "love." It doesn't matter what word or words you use; just use whatever seems appropriate to you.

The fourth possibility is to look at the details of the breath. Can you pick out the beginning of the in-breath, middle of the in-breath, end of the in-breath, the gap, the beginning of the out-breath, middle of the out-breath, end of the out-breath, the gap? Don't try to name all these parts; it goes far to fast for that. Just notice them.

The fifth aid is the one from the suttas where mindfulness of breathing is discussed.[3] That aid is to notice the long breaths and the short breaths. Pay attention to each in-breath and notice if the current one is longer than average or shorter than average. Do the same for each out-breath. You can also pay attention to see if every long in-breath is always followed by a long out-breath—and the same for short in- and out-breaths.

These are the possible aids: counting the gaps between the out- and the in-breaths up to eight; a visualization, like an ocean wave; a word or pair of words, like "bud-dho" or "peace" and "love"; noticing the details—beginning, middle, end, gap, beginning, middle, end, gap—and noticing the relative lengths of each in- and out-breath. They can help get you to the point where you're not becoming distracted. But this is not yet access concentration. Let go of the aid—stop the counting, stop the visualization, stop the word, stop really looking at the parts of the breath, stop working to notice the lengths of the breaths—and just be with the breath. When you do, it's going to feel like you have regressed because you'll likely start becoming distracted again. It's OK; just keep relaxing and

coming back to the breath, and eventually you'll settle in again, knowing each and every in-breath and out-breath. When you are knowing every in-breath and out-breath, and you're not getting distracted and you're not using an aid, that's access concentration.

In summary, sit in a comfortable, upright posture that you can maintain for the length of the sitting. Put your attention on the breathing by noticing the tactile sensations associated with it. Pay attention at the nostrils if possible, or the belly or the chest. You can use one of the aids. When you get distracted, which is no big deal, label the distraction and then intentionally relax. Bring your attention back to the tactile sensations of breathing. Repeat until you feel settled. If you're still using an aid, drop the aid; repeat until you feel settled without the aid; then you're at access concentration. Then stay at access concentration for 5, 10, 15 minutes, if you want to enter the jhānas.

The following questions on mindfulness of breathing as an access method arose after I had presented the above material on a retreat:

QUESTION: I guess I don't think of noticing the parts of the breath as being a technique or an aid. If one drops that, isn't one still noticing all the parts and pieces of the in-breath and the out-breath?
ANSWER: There's still noticing of the whole breath cycle but not an attempt to notice "that's the beginning," "that's the middle," "that's the end." So it's like you're noticing the breath more holistically, and you're no longer trying to divide it into the pieces. Does that make sense?

QUESTION: I guess it's a question of degree then?
ANSWER: If you have a clipboard with papers attached, you know this is the clip part, and this is the paper, and here's the front, and here's the back, and there is writing on the paper. It's like you're almost straining to see the bits and pieces. When you drop the aid, it's like you are seeing just the clipboard, not the individual pieces that make up the clipboard.

QUESTION: And when you're using this as an aid, it's a constant, dedicated effort?
ANSWER: Yes, dedicating effort to recognize, "that's the beginning of the in-breath," "ah, that's the middle of it," "this is the end of it." You can't be mentally saying all that; it's just really working to know all the individual pieces. Whereas when you are settled and drop the aid, there's just the breathing. All those pieces are still there—none of them are unnoticed—but your awareness becomes more holistic, rather than focused on the parts.

Mettā Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation—mettā meditation—can be used very effectively to generate access concentration and enter the jhānas. There are a number of ways to do mettā meditation, and all of them will work as long as you really are seriously doing the mettā practice and not thinking about where you hope it will take you.

All the methods of mettā meditation involve wishing that you and others be well and happy. This is generally done by working with categories. The first category is yourself. You really do want to experience well-being—regardless of whether or not you have any hang-ups about deserving well-being. Forget about deserving happiness, "deserving" is not ever part of mettā practice: not part of it when you are directing mettā to yourself and not part of it when you are directing it to anyone else. Although mettā is usually translated as "loving-kindness," it really is "unconditional love." "Deserving" has no part in something unconditional. The far enemy—the opposite—of mettā is hatred; this is obvious. The near enemy—something that masquerades as mettā—is said to be attachment. But we could also say the near enemy of mettā is "conditional liking." So true mettā practice is simply wishing the best for someone just because they are a someone.

When you are using mettā as an access method, begin your mettā practice with at least five minutes of wishing yourself well. Then move on to the other categories of beings. You can pick one individual per category, or you can think of multiple beings in each category. You want to spend at least half an hour practicing mettā to generate access concentration, so don't rush. The usual categories recommended for mettā practice can be summarized as follows:

- yourself
- people you admire—your benefactors for example
- people you are close to—your family and friends
- neutral people—your acquaintances, such as neighbors, coworkers, people you see in stores and restaurants you frequent
- difficult people—ones who have harmed you or those you care about or who have caused harm to society or the environment
- all beings—you can start with those in your physical proximity and work outward in expanding areas until you cover the whole planet; then expand your mettā to all the beings in the entire universe

If you have trouble sending mettā to yourself, then it's a very good idea to come back to yourself at the end of any period of mettā meditation and once again spend some time wishing yourself well.

The most commonly taught method of mettā meditation is done by silently repeating phrases. It is best to have about four simple phrases. Complicated phrases and more than four of them don't as easily generate the concentration necessary. I suggest using something like the following:

May (I/you/all beings) be happy.
May (I/you/all beings) be healthy.
May (I/you/all beings) be safe.
May (I/you/all beings) be at peace.

Just be sure to pick words that you resonate with.

You may find that it is difficult to wish happiness, health, and safety to the difficult people. If that's the case, you might want to try the phrases that Ayya Khema suggested, which are more closely related to what is found in the suttas:

May (I/you/all beings) be free from enmity.
May (I/you/all beings) be free from hurtfulness.
May (I/you/all beings) be free of troubles of mind and body.
May (I/you/all beings) be able to protect (my own/your/their) happiness.

You certainly can wish difficult people be free of hostility and hurtfulness. You can wish that they be free of troubles of mind—after all, then they would not be so difficult. Maybe their difficulty stems in part from troubles of body, so maybe you can wish they be free of bodily troubles as well. And when you understand that the only happiness that can be protected is that which is generated via wise and wholesome actions, you can even wish difficult people have happiness that can be protected.

The purpose of the phrases is to help you generate the feeling. Once the feeling of mettā becomes strong, it is not necessary to always say the entire phrase. You might then switch to just saying the key words: *happy, healthy, safe, peace*. And the time between the words might grow longer as the feeling grows stronger. Use the phrases or words just enough to keep the mettā feeling strong.

A second way of doing mettā meditation is by using a visualization. Ayya Khema had dozens of these visualizations[4] that she would choose from for her guided mettā meditation each evening. The following is one of these visualizations:

Please put the attention on the breath for just a few moments.

Imagine that your heart is filled with sunshine. Feel the warmth of it. The brightness. The satisfaction that it brings. The contentment. Let that sun in your heart fill you with joy and embrace you.

Now let the sun in your heart shine on the person nearest you in this room. Bringing with it the love and joy that your heart contains, filling him or her with these feelings as your gift.

And now let the sun from your heart expand so that it can shine on everyone here, bringing with it the best that your heart has to offer. Warmth. Love. Peace. Joy.

Let the sun in your heart shine on your parents, bringing them the warmth, the fulfillment, the joy and the peace that your heart contains.

Let the sun in your heart shine on those people who are nearest and dearest to you, giving them the best that your heart has to offer. Brightness. Warmth. Love. Fill them with those feelings. Embrace them with the sunshine from your heart.

Think of your friends. Let the sun from your heart shine on each one of them, filling their hearts with the warmth of sunshine, the feeling of joy, being embraced by the rays of the sun. Feeling loved and protected.

Think of other people you know, whomever they might be. Let the sun from your heart expand so that the rays can warm these people, bringing them joy and love.

Think of anyone whom you might have difficulties with. The sun shines indiscriminately on everyone. Let the sun from your heart shine on that person with the warmth and the joy and the love that the sun entails, because it makes everything grow.

Open your heart as wide as you can. Let the sun in your heart shine on as many people as you can imagine, bringing the warmth and the care from your heart to them. Filling them with joy, surrounding them with love.

Put your attention back on yourself. Feel the warmth of the sun in your heart. Feel the joy of sharing and the peacefulness of a loving heart. Fill yourself with that joy. Embrace yourself and surround yourself with peace, feeling safe and protected in that embrace.

May there be sunshine in everyone’s heart.

Of course you can run through the above in less than a minute, but that won’t generate access concentration. If you are using a visualization like the above, you should spend a number of minutes with each category so that the whole

practice takes half an hour or more.

If you can just generate the feeling of love without using any words or any visualization, that works fine as well for generating access concentration. Again, start with yourself and move on to the other categories, taking at least half an hour. You might find it helpful to say a word or two from the phrases if the mettā feeling starts to fade. It's analogous to a potter kicking the flywheel to impart more momentum. The potter doesn't kick continuously—only as needed.

No matter what method you choose for doing mettā meditation, you have to do it whole-heartedly. A thought of the jhānas should not cross your mind while doing the half hour or more of mettā practice. You also don't need to wonder if your practice is having an effect on the other person—that doesn't really matter. It is definitely having an effect on you, and that effect will carry over to the next time you encounter that person.

Unlike the breath becoming very subtle, there is no really obvious marker of access concentration when using mettā as the access method. It is possible the diffused white light might appear, but it seems to do so less frequently when doing mettā than when doing mindfulness of breathing. Your best markers of whether or not you have reached access concentration are twofold: you are continually with the mettā feeling, not getting distracted, and it seems like at least half an hour has passed. Then drop your attention to the feeling of mettā and of those to whom you are sending it, and switch your attention to a pleasant physical sensation. Most likely you will find such a sensation in the area of your heart. Just lock your attention onto that feeling, enjoy it fully, and let the jhāna come find you.

It is possible to remain focused on just the mettā feeling itself as the pleasant sensation. If you wish to go that route, it is necessary that the feeling remain strong without using any word or phrase or visualization. Whether the pleasant sensation is physical or mental, just fix your attention onto it and enjoy it without distraction.

If you find your mind wandering away from the pleasant feeling too much, you might not have generated access concentration. You can at that point go back to doing more mettā and try again later, or switch to mindfulness of breathing. If you choose to switch to your breathing, follow the instructions given in chapter 3, "Entering the Jhānas." If the pleasant feeling disappears, then you will have to either go back to doing mettā practice or switch to mindfulness of breathing.

If either of these happens, during the next meditation period that you attempt to use mettā to generate access concentration, be sure to stay longer with the mettā practice before switching to the pleasant feeling. If the problem persists

over many meditation periods, it may be necessary to go from mettā practice directly to the breath, let concentration deepen there, and then switch to the pleasant feeling.

For people who really like doing mettā meditation, this is a very effective way to generate access concentration and enter the jhānas. Not only are you becoming concentrated, you are generating a very positive state of mind, which is very helpful in getting the sukha going. In fact, it is not uncommon for someone who is using mettā as their access method to get mostly sukha and very little pīti when the jhāna arrives. Don't worry about that—just put your attention on the sukha feeling, stay locked onto it, and let your mind absorb into it to such an extent that any background thinking subsides. Then you arrive in the second jhāna without experiencing an overly excited, gleeful first jhāna.

The relationship between mettā meditation and the jhānas that is found in the suttas is reversed from what is described above. Mettā is not used to generate access concentration, but rather in the Tevijja Sutta (DN 13), the first jhāna is used as a preliminary practice before beginning mettā meditation and the other three brahma-vihāras meditations. In that sutta the usual gradual training steps of precepts, guarding the senses, mindfulness, contentment, and abandoning the five hindrances are followed by only the first jhāna. "Then with one's heart filled with loving-kindness, one dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus one dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart filled with loving-kindness, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will" (DN 13.76). The vitakka and vicāra of the first jhāna are intentionally directed to "thinking"[b] the mettā practice, with the pīti and sukha remaining low-grade and in the background. The three additional brahma-vihāra practices of compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity can be done in turn, following time spent doing the mettā practice. This is a wonderful way to do brahma-vihāra practices, but it turns out to be very important to keep the pīti at a very low level—pīti that is too strong tends to generate unwanted distractions.

In the mythological Mahāsudassana Sutta (DN 17), all four jhānas are practiced before beginning the same fourfold brahma-vihāra practice.[5]

Body Scan, also Known as Sweeping

S. N. Goenka made this technique well known in the West, although his teacher U Ba Khin deserves a great deal of credit as well. There are a number of ways to do a body scan, but the most effective way for generating access concentration

seems to be to sweep your attention systematically over every square inch of the surface of your body, noticing whatever sensation you can along the way. Don't worry if you encounter places where there are no sensations—zero is a valid number. The scan should be done slowly and take about 35 to 40 minutes. Even if a pleasant sensation is encountered or arises somewhere else in your body, complete the scan of your whole body before switching to focusing on the pleasant sensation. You want to let the concentration become sufficiently strong so that you can stay with the subtle pleasant sensation until the jhāna arises. If there is not a pleasant sensation noticeable when you finish the body scan, switch your attention to following your breathing, and continue with the instructions in the chapter "Entering the Jhānas."

If you want to learn how to do this method, it is very helpful to have someone guide you through the scan at least once and maybe even several times. There are MP3s of Ayya Khema doing a guided body scan, which she refers to as "part-by-part," at http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/8001/19960705-Ayya_Khema-GGZ-guided_sweeping_meditation_part_by_part.mp3 and http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/334/talk/7819/19950706-Ayya_Khema-NTG-sweeping_technique_part_by_part.mp3. There is an MP3 of me doing a guided body scan at http://www.audiodharma.org/mp3files/2007-02-03_LeighBrasington_GuidedMeditationBodySweep.mp3.

Nada Sound, also Known as the Sound of Silence

Students of Ajahn Sumedho and the other monastics from Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England may be familiar with working with the "nada sound," or "sound of silence." Ajahn Sumedho talks at length about this technique in his books The *Way It Is* and *Sound of Silence*. Ajahn Amaro, one of Ajahn Sumedho's students, writes

> Nada is the Sanskrit word for "sound," and nada yoga means meditating on the inner sound, also referred to as the sound of silence. (Interestingly, nada is also the Spanish word for "nothing.")
>
> To detect the nada sound, turn your attention toward your hearing. If you listen carefully to the sounds around you, you're likely to hear a continuous, high-pitched inner sound like white noise in the background. It is a sound that is beginningless and endless.
>
> There's no need to theorize about this inner vibration in an effort to figure out exactly what it might be. Just turn your attention to it. If you're able to hear this inner sound, you can use the simple act of listening to it as another form of meditation practice, in the same way one uses the breath as

an object of awareness. Just bring your attention to the inner sound and allow it to fill the whole sphere of your awareness.[6]

Following the above simple instructions will generate nice, deep access concentration—in people who like listening to this inner sound. Others find the sounds annoying or worry about training themselves to always hear this sound; this practice is not useful for them. But if you like working in this way, listen to this sound of silence for about half an hour. If at that point you are no longer becoming distracted, drop your attention from that sound, and focus your attention on a pleasant sensation. Stay focused on the pleasantness of that pleasant sensation, enjoy it, and let the jhāna come and find you.

Again there are no distinct markers to tell you when you have generated access concentration, other than perhaps the diffused white light might appear. It's best to use the fact that you are not getting distracted, and it seems like at least half an hour has passed.

Mantra

Although the word *mantra* is almost never mentioned in vipassanā or Theravadan Buddhism,[c] mantras are a highly effective way of getting deeply concentrated. In fact, that is exactly why mantra meditation was developed. It is far beyond the scope of this book to discuss how to do mantra meditation, but if you already know a form of mantra meditation, you can use it to generate access concentration. A shorter mantra is usually better than a lengthy one for generating concentration.

As with all access methods, after having done your preliminaries as described in appendix 2, "Helpful Things to Do at the Beginning and End of Each Meditation Period," begin saying your mantra silently. Eventually instead of it feeling like you are doing the mantra, it will feel as though the mantra is doing you. Now you are likely to have arrived at access concentration—provided of course that you are not becoming distracted. Stay with the mantra doing you for five to ten minutes; then drop the mantra, and switch your attention to a pleasant sensation. As usual, stay focused on the pleasantness of that pleasant sensation, enjoy it, and let the jhāna come and find you.

Other Methods

As mentioned above, the *Visuddhimagga* gives quite a number of additional methods for generating access concentration. Most prominent is meditation on a kasiṇa—a color disk about the size of a dinner plate. The *Visuddhimagga* goes into a quite detailed description of how this is done,[7] along with discussing other

techniques as well.[8] Just remember that the jhānas being discussed in the *Visuddhimagga* are not the same as what is found in the suttas; the *Visuddhimagga* jhānas require far more concentration. However, the techniques described there are nonetheless useful for learning the other access methods not described in this book.

a This description of ānāpānasati is for the sake of access concentration and then jhāna. For a full treatment of ānāpānasati as a complete system of mindfulness training and samatha-vipassanā, please see MN 118 and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's excellent book *Mindfulness with Breathing*.

b Pali, like many Asian languages, does not distinguish between thoughts and emotions. Hence "thinking" would be the word used for "feeling" mettā and the other three brahma-vihāras emotions.

c Ajahn Sao, Ajahn Mun, Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Thate, Ajahn Maha Bua, and Ajahn Lee all taught using "bud-dho" when breathing in and out. This is mantra meditation in the Thai Forest Tradition—see Polak, *Reexamining jhāna*, 181.

APPENDIX 4:

In or Out: The Relationship between Jhāna Practice and Insight Practice

ONE OF THE ONGOING DEBATES among jhāna practitioners is the relationship between the jhānas and insight practice. In one camp are those who think insight practice should be done while remaining in the jhānas. In the other camp are those who say that insight practice needs to be done upon emerging from the jhānas.

Those who feel insight practice should be done while in the jhānas usually cite the Anupada Sutta at MN 111. But as can be seen on the web page "MN 111" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/MN_111.htm, MN 111 is not a reliable source of information as to what the Buddha was teaching. Another possible source of inspiration for suggesting that insight practice be done while in the jhānas could be the Mahāmāluṅkya Sutta at MN 64. But again this sutta is not a reliable source, as it appears to be a relatively late composition.[1]

Those who feel insight practice is best done after the jhānas point to the gradual training, particularly to the insight step found after the description of the fourth jhāna.[2] Their argument is that vitakka and vicāra ("thinking and examining," or "thinking and more thinking") has subsided by the time one enters the second jhāna. Without vitakka and vicāra, it is not possible to understand "This is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion, and this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it."[3] There is just far too much mental activity required to contemplate all these qualities and their interrelationships to be able to comprehend this without any thinking.

If you restrict insight practice to only being done while in the jhānas, then upon emerging from the jhānas, what should you do? Since far more of your life is going to be spent not in the jhānas, does this mean there are no insight

practices to do after you leave the jhānas? Is all that time basically not useful for gaining insight?

If you feel that insight practice should be done upon emerging from the jhānas, then there are a whole host of insight practices available to engage in—see the web page "A Partial List of Insight Practices" at http://rc.leighb.com/more/A_Partial_List_of_Insight_Practices.htm. Any of these can be taken up upon emerging from the jhānas—and that includes walking meditation and eating meditation when you arise from your sitting meditation period. The huge number of possible objects of examination provides a far greater opportunity for "knowing and seeing things as they are" than does limiting your examination to the qualities of the jhānas.

In order to attain liberation, you need to become disenchanted with the things of the world that you are craving and clinging to. It's not very likely that the qualities of the jhānas are your major sources of craving and clinging. It certainly will be much more valuable to examine where you are actually caught than to take a close look at things that are not entrapping you. To do the latter is like looking for your keys where the light is good rather than where you might have lost them!

Nothing I can write in this book is going to settle this discussion. Partially that's because neither of these practices is wrong practice. Doing insight practice in a jhānic state—provided you can even do so without losing the jhāna—will indeed give you insight into the impermanent, ultimately unsatisfactoriness, and emptiness of the jhānas. No doubt that will be useful. Insight into the impermanent, ultimately unsatisfactoriness, and emptiness of the things you are craving and clinging to will also be very useful. All I can really say is that there appear to be far more places in the suttas where insight practice is taught to be done after the jhānas than in the jhānas. Furthermore the post-jhāna insight instructions seem to be part of much earlier strata of material than the in-jhāna insight instructions.

What is without a doubt is that "wisdom, when imbued with concentration, brings great fruit and profit."[4] The jhānas will certainly turbocharge your insight practice whether that practice is done in the jhānas or after the jhānas or both.

Notes

Preface

1. MN 22.38 and SN 22.86. See Bhikkhu Bodhi, “I Teach Only Suffering and the End of Suffering,” *Tricycle Magazine*, Winter 2013, for a detailed discussion of this famous phrase.
2. Translation by Ven. Khantipalo.

Introduction

1. E.g., DN 22.21; MN 141.31; SN 45.8; AN 5.28.
2. MN 36.31. Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions*, section 1.5, p. 24, refers to this “passage which appears to contain very old elements (Horsch, 1964; Bareau, 1963: 47–48, 52–53).”
3. E.g., MN 8.18, 19.27, 108.15, 152.18; SN 35.146, 43.1, 43.13, 43.44, 47.10; AN 5.73–74, 7.74, 9.19.
4. E.g., DN 2–8, 10–12; MN 38.39–40, MN 64, 77; AN 5.28.
5. The faculty of concentration is defined as the four jhānas at SN 48.10. The power of concentration is defined as the four jhānas at AN 5.14.
6. E.g., DN 22.21; MN 141.31; SN 45.8; AN 5.28.
7. MN 26.15–16.

Chapter 1. The Preliminaries

1. E.g., DN 2–13; MN 27, 38, 39, 51, 53, 76, 79, 101, 107, 112, 125; AN 4.198, 5.75–76, 10.99.
2. *Ehipassiko*.
3. DN 2.64.

4. DN 22.4 and MN 10.8.

Chapter 3. Entering the Jhānas

1. DN 1.3.23.

Chapter 4. First Jhāna

1. Vsm 4.94–99, pp. 137–39.
2. Tibetan: *gtum-mo;* Sanskrit: *caṇḍālī. The* so-called mystic heat practice.

Chapter 5. Second Jhāna

1. Anguttara-Nikāya 10.72: Kaṇṭaka Sutta, “Thorns.”

Chapter 7. Fourth Jhāna

1. Khema, “Who Is My Self?” 65.
2. See for example MN 18, 24, 35, 54, *66*, 75, 82, 88, 97; many places in the SN as well.

Chapter 9. The Immaterial Jhānas

1. Vsm 4.100 and expanded upon in the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*.

Chapter 10. With a Mind Thus Concentrated

1. Luuk Tinbergen, “The Natural Control of Insects in Pine Woods: Factors Influencing the Intensity of Predation by Song-birds,” *Archives Néerlandaises de Zoologie* 13 (1960): 265–343.
2. “Attention and the Search Image,” in *Avian Visual Cognition*, edited by Robert G. Cook, Department of Psychology, Tufts University, in cooperation with Comparative Cognition Press (2001), www.pigeon.psy.tufts.edu/avc/pblough/si_attention.htm.

Chapter 11. Vitakka and Vicāra

1. See Anālayo, *Comparative Study*, 15, for more about this type of repetition.
2. Bodhi, Aṅguttara Nikāya, 1649n436.
3. Roderick S. Bucknell, "The Importance of Pali/Chinese Comparisons in Studies of Early Buddhist Doctrine," paper presented at the ninth annual conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Canberra, August 1984, p. 4.
4. See *Polak, Reexamining jhāna*, 137–42, for a more detailed discussion of the use of the words *vitakka* and *vicāra* in the suttas.

Chapter 12. First Jhāna

1. Vsm 4.79ff. See also Pa-Auk, 2000, 102.
2. See Bucknell, "Importance of Pali/Chinese Comparisons," 4.
3. In the Chinese āgama corresponding to the Cūlavedalla Sutta (MN 44), the topic of the five factors of the first jhāna does appear—see Anālayo, *Comparative Study*, 2. The fact that it appears in a different āgama would also seem to indicate its being a late insertion.
4. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1902; quoted in Pande, 1995, 138.
5. Vsm 4.32, p. 122; *4*.42, *p*. 124ff; also 4.74, p. 131ff.

Chapter 13. Second Jhāna

1. Anguttara-Nikāya 10.72: Kaṇṭaka Sutta, "Thorns."

Chapter 14. Third Jhāna

1. DN 1.3.23.
2. Anguttara-Nikāya 10.72: Kaṇṭaka Sutta, "Thorns."

Chapter 15. Fourth Jhāna

1. E.g., DN 22.11; MN 10.32; SN 36 passim.
2. See Anālayo, *Comparative Study*, 14, for more about these types of memory aids.

3. Anguttara-Nikāya 10.72: Kaṇṭaka Sutta, “Thorns.”

Chapter 16. The Jhāna Summary

1. DN 2–13; MN 7, 40; SN 12.23, 35.97, 42.13, 47.10, 55.40; AN 3.95, 5.26, 6.10, 10.1–5, 11.12.
2. Bodhi, “Discourse on the Fruits,” 148–52.
3. DN 2.42.

Chapter 17. Insight Knowledge

1. E.g., SN 22.59; MN 109.
2. MN 112, which is probably a late composition, uses *viññāna* in all four ways in the same sutta.

Chapter 18. The Immaterial States

1. E.g., Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (DN 9.28).
2. E.g., Mahānidāna Sutta (DN 15.2); “The City” (SN 12.65).
3. E.g., “Analysis of Dependent Origination” (SN 12.2) and many other suttas in SN 12.
4. E.g., Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions*, sections 7.2.1–4, pp. 55–67, and Polak, *Reexamining Jhāna*, 114–27.
5. Wynne, *Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, 42–62.

Chapter 19. The Cessation of Perception and Feeling

1. Vsm 12, p. 701ff. See also Pa-Auk, 2000, p. 235: “you will find that eventually all formations cease.”
2. E.g., DN 9, 16; MN 25, 26, 30, 31, 43, 44, 50, 59, 111, 113.
3. Vsm 11.124, 13.18.ii.
4. See www.melafilms.com/pages/documentary.html.
5. Vsm 4.79ff. See also Pa-Auk, 2000, p. 102.
6. Roderick S. Bucknell, “Reinterpreting the Jhānas,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 16 (2 Winter 1993): 403 (page 403 in particular, but the whole article is very helpful for seeing this).

Chapter 20. The Psychic Powers

1. From a note to Robert S. Marcus, February 12, 1950, on the occasion of his son passing away due to polio. See http://weblog.liberatormagazine.com/2010/10/einstein-on-being-human-sayings.html.
2. E.g., MN 4.27, 19.14ff, 36.40, 85.38, 100.37.
3. See www.skeptiko.com/stuart-hameroff-on-quantum-consciousness-and-singularity/.
4. See for example the Susīma Sutta at SN 22.70 and the Khemaka Sutta at SN 22.89. Alexander Wynne discusses all three of these suttas and this split in his paper "Miraculous Transformation and Personal Identity: A Note on The First *Anātman* Teaching of the Second Sermon" (2009).

Chapter 21. Ending the Āsavas

1. Cf. AN 1.46.
2. See Pande, 1995, 86.
3. MN 36.44.
4. DN 2.97–98.

Chapter 22. Other Benefits of Jhāna Practice

1. A. Pascual-Leone, C. Freitas, L. Oberman, J. C. Horvath, M. Halko, M. Eldaief, et al., "Characterizing Brain Cortical Plasticity and Network Dynamics across the Age-Span in Health and Disease with TMS-EEG and TMS-fMRI," *Brain Topography* 24: 302–15. doi 10.1007/s10548-011-0196-8.
2. Richard J. Davidson and Antoine Lutz, "Buddha's Brain: Neuroplasticity and Meditation," *IEEE Signal Processing Magazine*, September 2007, 176.
3. Ibid., 173.
4. Massachusetts General Hospital, "Mindfulness Meditation Training Changes Brain Structure in Eight Weeks," Science-Daily, January 21, 2011. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/01/110121144007.htm.
5. Goleman, *Destructive Emotions*, ch. 8, esp. 194, and ch. 14, esp. 334–46. See also Daniel Goleman, "Finding Happiness: Cajole Your Brain to Lean to the Left," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/02/04/health/behavior-finding-happiness-cajole-

your-brain-to-lean-to-the-left.html.

6. E.g., the phrase “the four jhānas that constitute the higher mind and are pleasant abiding here and now” occurs at MN 6.9, 53.6, 108.17, 119.36, 21.4, and over 20 times in the AN.
7. Michael R. Hagerty, Julian Isaacs, Leigh Brasington, Larry Shupe, and Eberhard E. Fetz, “EEG Power and Coherence Analysis of an Expert Meditator in the Eight Jhānas,” working paper presented at the 2008 Mind and Life Conference, available from http://leighb.com/eegjhanas.htm, p. 11.

Appendix 1. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Personal communication from Ayya Khema sometime in the period 1991–94.
2. MN 26.15–16.
3. MN 36.30.
4. MN 36.31.
5. MN 36.34.
6. Khema, *I Give You My Life*, 160.
7. MN 118.18–21; SN 54.1, 3, 4, 6–20.
8. E.g., DN 22.21; MN 141.31; SN 45.8.
9. See for example MN 18, 24, 35, 54, 66, 75, 82, 88, 97; many places in the SN as well.

Appendix 2. Helpful Things to Do at the Beginning and End of Each Meditation Period

1. Adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1996), 5.
2. Dhp 113.

Appendix 3. Access Concentration Methods

1. Vsm 3.104–06, pp. 104–5.
2. E.g., DN 22.2; MN 10.4, 118.17; SN 54 (many suttas).
3. E.g., DN 22.2; MN 10.4, 118.18; SN 54 (many suttas).
4. A number of Ayya Khema’s guided visualizations have been transcribed and are available on the Internet at http://leighb.com/metta.htm.

5. DN 17.2.3–4.
6. Ajahn Amaro, “The Sound of Silence,” in *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner’s Quarterly*, Winter 2012.
7. Vsm 4.1–33, pp. 113–22.
8. Vsm 3–13, pp. 81–430.

Appendix 4. In or Out: The Relationship between Jhāna Practice and Insight Practice

1. Pande, 1995, “Studies in the Origin of Buddhism,” 135. Anālayo, Comparative Study, 355–58 discusses the Chinese āgama corresponding to MN 64 and points out that even though insight practice is to be done while in the jhānas, the method is different.
2. E.g., DN 2.83, also found in many other suttas in the first section of DN and in MN 38.39–40, 77.26.
3. DN 2.83.
4. DN 16.1.12.

Glossary

Abhidhamma. The third division of the Pali canon, consisting of a deconstructionist, metaphysical view of the Buddha's doctrine.
adukkha and asukha. Neither painful nor pleasant, neither happiness nor unhappiness.
ajjhattam sampasādana. Inner tranquility.
ānāpānasati. Mindfulness of breathing.
aṅga. Factor; a constituent part of a whole or system or collection.
arahat. A worthy one, meaning fully awakened.
āsava. Intoxicant; also translated as outflow, influx, effluent, canker, taint.
bhavatanhā. Craving for becoming.
Bodhisatta. (Pali) The Buddha-to-be before his awakening.
bodhisattva. (Sanskrit) A being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others and is worshipped as a deity in Mahayana Buddhism; the personification of an archetype.
brahma-vihāra. One of four meditation practices of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity.
cetaso. The genitive *of ceto*, which is derived from *citta*, meaning "heart/mind."
citta. Heart/mind.
citt'ekaggata. One-pointedness of mind.
dhamma. Phenomena. When capitalized, refers to the teaching of the Buddha and also "the way things truly are."
dukkha. Bummer,[a] unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering.
ehipassiko. Come and see for yourself.
ekaggata. One-pointedness; see also *citt'ekaggata*.
ekodi-bhavam. Concentrated, attentive, fixed + become.
iddhi. Psychic power.
jhāna. Literally "meditation"; one of four (later eight) states of concentration.
jhāyati. To meditate.
kāmatanhā. Sensual craving.
kāya. Group, heap, collection, body.

kāyena. Bodily, physical.
khandha. One of the five aggregates: rūpa, vedanā, saññā, sankhara, viññāṇa.
mantra. A sound, syllable, word, or group of words that is repeated silently in order to generate concentration.
mettā. Loving-kindness, unconditional love.
ñāṇa. Knowledge.
nibbāna. Literally "not burning"—that is, not buring with the fires of greed, hate, or delusion; the goal of the holy life, the realization that brings an end to *dukkha*.
nimitta. Sign. It later came to have a more specific meaning of a visual circle of light appearing as a sign of deep concentration.
pāmojja. Gladness, worldly joy.
paññā. Wisdom.
parinibbāna. Usually it means the death of an arahat, occasionally used synonymously with nibbāna.
passaddhakāya. Bodily tranquility.
pīti. Glee, rapture.
rūpa. Materiality, body.
saddhā. Usually translated as "faith" but perhaps more accurately as "confidence."
samatha. Calm.
samādhi. Indistractability, concentration.
sampajañña. Clear comprehension.
samsāra. Worldly existence, the indefinitely repeating cycles of birth, dukkha, and death.
saññā. Perception, naming, identifying, conceptualizing.
saññāvedayitanirodha. The cessation of perception and feeling.
sati. Mindfulness, remembering to be here now.
sīla. Morality, ethical behavior.
somanassa and domanassa. Joy and grief.
sukha. Happiness/joy.
sukha and dukkha. Pleasure and pain.
sutta. Discourse, teaching; the second division of the Pali canon, consisting of discourses given by the Buddha or his closest disciples.
taṇhā. Craving (literally "thirst").
upacāra-samādhi. Access concentration: fully with the object of meditation, and if there are any thoughts, they are not distracting.
upekkha. Equanimity (literally "gaze upon").
vicāra. Examining.

viññāṇa. Consciousness; occasionally it means “mind”; literally “divided knowing.”
vipassanā. Insight, an understood experience.
vitakka. Thinking.

a See the essay “*Dukkha* is a Bummer” at http://leighb.com/bummer.htm for a detailed exploration of why “bummer” is a good translation of *dukkha*.

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May any merit from this project be to the benefit and liberation of all beings everywhere!

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About the Author

LEIGH BRASINGTON was born and raised in Mississippi. In he graduated from Rhodes College in Memphis with a BA in mathematics with honors, Phi Beta Kappa. He then began a more than 35-year career of "playing with computers for money." After he moved to San Francisco in 1974, he began taking extended time to travel: three years around the world in 1979–81, a year traveling in Australia and Asia in 1988, six months around the world in 1988, plus numerous shorter trips overseas as well.

He began meditating in 1985 and eventually became the senior North American student of Venerable Ayya Khema. She authorized him to teach, and he began leading residential retreats in 1997. He has taught jhānas and insight practices in over one hundred residential retreats.

Near the end of 2008, he retired from software engineering, and over the next three years, he spent 20 months in retreat at the Insight Meditation Society's Forest Refuge. It was during these half dozen long retreats that, among other investigations, he began closely examining his experiences of the jhānas and the descriptions of the jhānas found in the suttas. This book is the result of that study, coupled with many years of practicing and teaching the jhānas.

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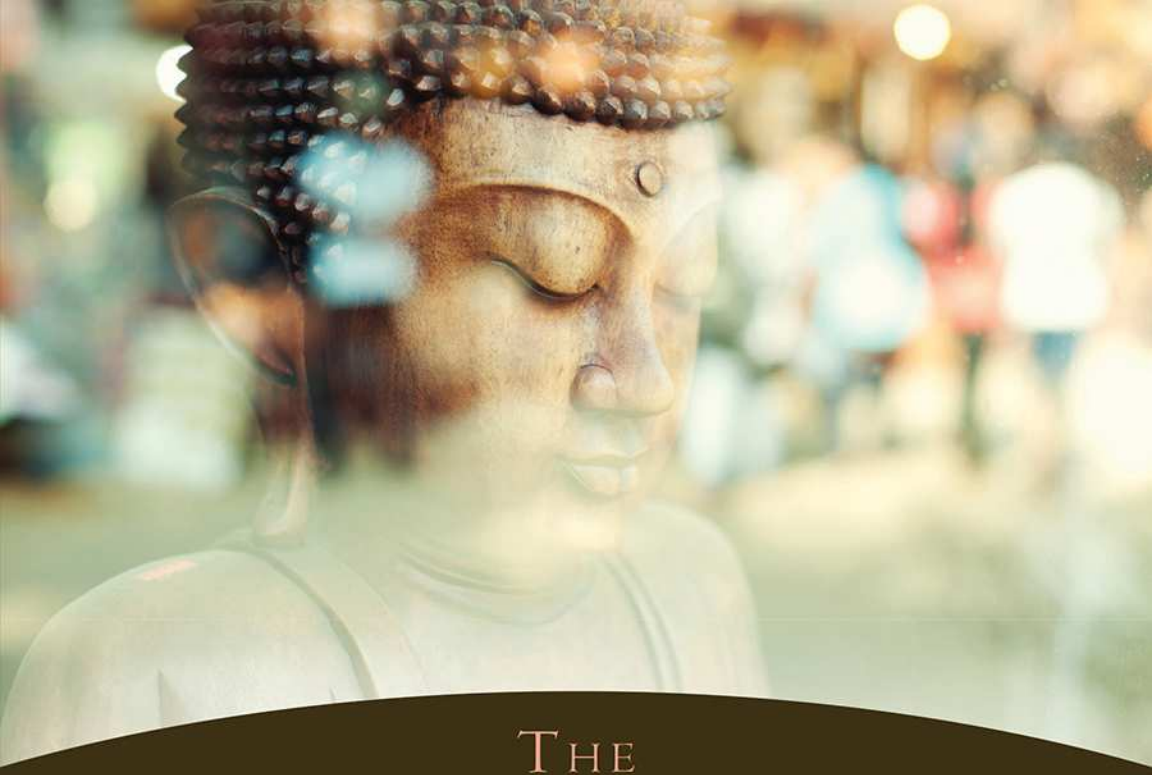

The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation

mindfulness, concentration, and insight

RICHARD SHANKMAN

"What a joy to read *The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation*. This book is filled with the author's warmth, wisdom, and compassion. Richard Shankman has offered a very clear and user-friendly companion for anyone wanting to learn meditation.… A great gift."

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—**Guy Armstrong**, senior teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and the Insight Meditation Society

The Art and Skill of Buddhist Meditation

mindfulness, concentration, and insight

RICHARD SHANKMAN

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Introduction

Perhaps nothing is more emblematic of Buddhism than the image of a monk in silent meditation. With closed eyes and attention inward drawn, it evokes in us a sense of wisdom, peace, and calm.

Ever since the Buddha's great awakening and discovery of a long-forgotten path to inner peace and happiness, meditators have followed in his footsteps. Ordinary people just like us have undertaken the same practices that have been handed down throughout the centuries. They have seen for themselves the treasures these teachings might hold in their own lives. We can realize the peace and happiness the Buddha discovered 2500 years ago.

This book is a travel guide along that same path to inner peace, meditation as it has been preserved and taught in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. Theravada means "school of the elders" and is the oldest living Buddhist tradition, the only one of the earliest Buddhist schools surviving today. Its texts are preserved in the Pali language.

This is a book of exploration and discovery. We will explore the essential elements of meditation, from beginning mindfulness to the deeper stages of concentration and insight—learning how to cultivate and strengthen them, and how to bring them together in our practice. We will discover the greatness of our capacity for wisdom, love, and kindness as we open to deep states of calm, clarity, and peace.

Meditation is not something mysterious or complicated. Meditation is accessible and practical. Its benefits are available for anyone interested in discovering what it may have to offer. Its practices and techniques are simple to do. Meditation is about learning how to live peacefully with quiet minds and open hearts. All the things we may have heard about that can come from meditation—wisdom, peace, and calm—we can realize for ourselves.

Buddhist meditation comprises a variety of practices for calming our mind and increasing awareness of our thoughts, moods, and

emotions. Being more aware of our experience offers the chance for meeting any situation in a more balanced way. We have the possibility to respond wisely when we can be more fully present and less reactive with whatever happens. We learn to move through all the ups and downs of life with balance and an inner sense of well-being.

Why Meditate?

You may be drawn to meditation for many reasons. You may be looking for a way to manage your stress and feel more peaceful and calm. Perhaps you want to quiet your mind, which is scattered all over the place, to stop obsessing and learn to relax. Or you are dealing with chronic pain or illness, or any other challenging situation that is hard to endure, and you are looking for tools to help. Sometimes we don't know exactly what we are looking for, but we know we are suffering or struggling in some way and have heard that meditation might help.

All of these benefits are available to us. Peace and joy may seem distant, but they are in actuality not so far away. They are within each of us, but we must turn our attention inward and come to know ourselves. With practice your mind will become trained and a natural sense of calm and contentment will follow.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation and teachings is to guide us toward a nonreactive equanimity and inner peace in the midst of all aspects of our lives. Beyond the importance and benefit of fostering the valuable skills of stress reduction, pain management, and relaxation, on a more fundamental level Buddhist teachings are asking us to make a shift in how and where we look for happiness, with far-reaching and profound consequences for our well-being.

Buddhist meditation is a mosaic of wise and skillful means for cultivating wholesome qualities of our hearts and minds, enabling us to live and act in ways that create more happiness and less suffering

for others and ourselves. We can learn to respond skillfully to any situation, with wisdom rather than reactivity. As we move about our daily lives with increasing open-heartedness and calm, we can meet our difficulties and learn to work with them.

The Buddha's Teaching

Buddhism is a down-to-earth, practical teaching. It is not interested in metaphysics or philosophy but, rather, in concrete steps we can apply directly to our life. The Buddha was inviting us to take an honest look at our life situation and ourselves. He was helping us find a way to lasting peace and happiness in the midst of life *as it is*.

The Buddha's teachings, known as *dharma*, offer a framework for understanding our world and ourselves. Though these teachings can seem complicated or imposing, their essence is expressed in a concise, yet comprehensive, formula: the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that life involves suffering, that life contains an unavoidable element of uncertainty and stress. One of the most misunderstood of all Buddhist concepts is the teaching on suffering. Many people believe the Buddha taught that life *is* suffering, but this a misconception. Buddhism acknowledges the obvious fact that life contains both happiness and misery, pleasure and pain.

It is not that there is no happiness to be found in this life. Getting happiness by having more of what we want and getting rid of experiences we do not like certainly bring their own rewards. But those rewards are not enduring. No experience will give us a stable, secure sense of satisfaction because everything is constantly changing and nothing is going to last.

Seeking our happiness solely in having or not having certain experiences—we call that a *conditioned happiness*, because it is dependent on circumstances—is a fragile kind of well-being. Even when things are going well, we know that the security and happiness

of the moment will ultimately be lost. On some level we know that life is uncertain, tenuous at best, and that anything can happen at any time. This can leave us feeling uneasy, never really at peace. Because everything is destined to change, we suffer when we cling to anything, when we try to hold on to what cannot last or fight against our experience when it is not to our liking.

This is the First Noble Truth, that life is uncertain and unreliable. We can appreciate the happiness of the moment, but when the situation inevitably changes we suffer if we try to hold on to the past we long for or push away the present we wish to be different than it is. We do not suffer if we can learn to let go and be at peace with the ever-changing flow of life.

The Second Noble Truth is that the suffering in our lives has a cause. This cause is usually translated as desire or craving. Another common misconception is that Buddhism teaches that desire is bad, that we are supposed to get rid of all desires. But the Buddha stressed the importance of wholesome desire. If you did not desire to understand Buddhist teachings and apply them in your life, you would not be drawn to meditation.

Most of us spend most of our time striving to get or hold on to more of those situations, people, and things we think will make us happy, and avoiding those we think will make us unhappy. We seek to have more pleasant experiences and fewer unpleasant ones. No one wants to have less of what they want and more of what they don't want in life. When things are not going our way, we can't wait for them to change. And when things are going well, we forget, we become complacent and caught up in our daily affairs, thinking everything will just continue on and on as it has been. But sometimes you get what you want and sometimes you do not, and sometimes you get what you do not want at all.

So the Second Noble Truth is that we create suffering by clinging to things or pushing them away, all because of a particular kind of desire: craving. Through wholesome desire we are motivated and

inspired to seek what is beneficial and good for ourselves and others. When healthy desire turns into craving, we cannot stand to be without those things or to let them go. When we are craving, our desire is so strong that we must have it, keep it, or get rid of it.

The Third Noble Truth is that there is an end to suffering. The enlightenment the Buddha discovered is often called a liberation through nonclinging. We can learn to ride the waves, navigating life's inevitable ups and downs with balance and grace. We can learn to let go of our suffering and live peacefully with quiet minds and open hearts in the midst of all that life gives us. All Buddhist teachings, and all the various meditation practices and techniques, are aids in service of this goal.

In the Fourth Noble Truth, the Buddha laid out a system for how to live and practice in order to cultivate wholesome qualities of our hearts and minds. This system is the Noble Eightfold Path. The first two elements of the Eightfold Path, Right Understanding (also known as Right View) and Right Intention, make up the wisdom section, and entail understanding the Buddha's teachings in order to aim one's efforts in the right direction. The morality or virtue section comprises the next three pieces, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. The final section is the path of meditation, the focus of this book, consisting of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Eightfold Path is a holistic system. Each factor is necessary for and dependent upon all the others. Most of this book focuses on the meditation section of the Eightfold Path but you cannot bypass the other elements, and they will be incorporated throughout the discussions. Without the wisdom to understand where you are aiming you cannot reach your goal, so you need Right Understanding and Right Intention. And your mind cannot settle down in meditation if you are mistreating others or embroiled in conflict, so you need to establish a foundation of virtue: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.

The Building Blocks of Meditation

Meditation aims us toward a more reliable way to find happiness, in which our well-being is not left to chance and life's uncertainties. Meditation is learning to let go of our obsessive tendencies of grasping for things we want and pushing away those we do not like, and to begin to look for happiness in how we relate to what is happening. We can find peace in any circumstance by letting go of craving and clinging, and by changing how we relate to whatever life brings us.

The concept of letting go and nonclinging is simple, but we soon find out that what sounds so simple, letting go of our suffering, is hard to do. To actualize this, we need to train our minds to more thoroughly learn how to let go. Our reactive patterns are strong and it is so easy for us to get caught over and over in our daily lives. If we say, "Do not cling to things or push anything away," perhaps we can do it in a given moment, but as soon as the right experience finds us, the particular causes and conditions arise—we are caught once again in our habitual reactive patterns. This is the place for meditation.

There are many meditation practices and they all aim to develop the key qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

Loving-Kindness and Compassion

A balanced meditation practice, as well as a balanced life, is built upon a foundation of kindness and compassion. Some people find their hearts opening naturally as mindfulness, concentration, and insight grow. For others it is helpful to devote part or all of their practice to developing such kindness and compassion.

Compassion for ourselves supports us in difficult times, when we are struggling to find a way to let go. Compassion for others helps us relate to them with empathy and kindness, instead of reactivity and

aversion. We learn how to engender kind thoughts and feelings and how to work skillfully to let go of negativity, seeking to suffuse a compassionate attitude into our meditation and our lives.

Mindfulness

Meditation begins with mindfulness. I define mindfulness in a simple way, as not being lost on "automatic pilot." Mindfulness means knowing whatever is happening rather than being caught up in your experience. It means being aware of yourself and your surroundings, not just going through the motions unaware of what you are doing. Being mindful means being awake to and fully present in any moment.

You can be mindful of anything. You can be aware of your thoughts and moods, what is happening in your body and what is going on around you. When you know your emotions without being entangled in them, you are able to make wise choices in how to respond to situations. You gain a balanced perspective that allows for greater freedom in meeting the flow of life's ups and downs.

Becoming more aware of your own experience, of what is happening in your mind and body, also helps foster a greater understanding of what *other* people are going through. You can notice those around you and how you are interacting with them. Having some space between your experience and your response to it opens you to greater possibilities and choice in how to act. Recognizing your mental and emotional patterns, you can begin to shift habitual behaviors.

In this book we will explore various ways to use and direct your attention in a purposeful way to strengthen concentration and insight. The first meditation practice I will offer is called mindfulness of breathing. This practice will help you learn how to connect with your breathing, so that your mind will grow more steady, more calm, and less distracted.

Concentration

Through the proper use of mindful attention you will learn how to compose and settle your mind, developing the quality of concentration. To be concentrated means your awareness is calm, collected, and undistracted. To be undistracted means your mind is not constantly wandering. You can direct your focus where and when you want and keep it there. A concentrated mind is amazingly clear and perceptive, beyond what is normally accessible.

With a steady, undistracted awareness, mindfulness can penetrate deeply and subtly as you turn your attention inward. A concentrated mind is described as being rid of impurities, bright, free from blemishes, flawless, pliable, adaptable, steady, and composed and collected. It is with this quality of mind that we turn toward insight.

Insight

We do not need the Buddha to tell us about suffering and stress. We know all about it. What we do not know, and what we need help with, is what to do about it. This is where insights can really help us.

A lot of emphasis is put on insight in Buddhist meditation. Insight means understanding the way things are, including life's uncertain and impermanent nature, and acknowledging and making peace with life on its own terms. We come to understand the inner workings of our mind and the nature of our body as it ages.

Insight blossoms as we connect with and come to know ourselves deeply and intimately. Increasingly, as mindfulness and concentration grow, we are able to clearly and directly perceive ever-subtler places of reactivity, their causes, and the way to let them go. We can see our habitual patterns and tendencies that lead to stress. We know when we are caught in those patterns and tendencies and understand how to let go of stress through nonclinging.

In the Buddha's path of awakening we seek to strengthen mindfulness and steady our minds in order to more clearly see things the way they really are. How to do this is the subject of this book.

Paths of Meditation

The various meditation practices all belong to one of three main branches of the meditation family: insight meditation, concentration meditation, and concentration and insight integrated as a single style of practice. Concentration and insight are both important in all these meditative paths. Because there is not just one way meditation is practiced and taught, there can be some confusion about how these two aspects of the practice fit together.

Insight meditation is often viewed and taught as a practice separate and distinct from concentration meditation. In this understanding, insight is equated with mindfulness, the present-moment awareness of whatever is happening. In the path of insight meditation—*vipassana* in Pali (pronounced vih-PAH-suh-nuh)—you apply mindfulness to meet your moment-to-moment experience, without any special effort devoted to cultivating concentration. Some degree of concentration will develop naturally as you sustain your attention on the array of experiences coming and going during the meditation session.

By paying attention to what is happening in each moment, you begin to clearly perceive and have insight into where you are clinging to or fighting against your experience. You start to learn how to meet difficulties and work with your suffering wisely. Meditators practicing in this style may not be concerned with developing the deeper stages of concentration, feeling that however much concentration naturally develops through mindful attention to their changing experiences is sufficient.

In the path of concentration meditation, you are concerned with the attainment of meditative states of highly undistracted awareness. Concentration meditation primarily seeks to calm and steady the mind. Some degree of insight develops naturally, as a result of being so undistracted, but the emphasis is on attaining deep stages of concentration known as *jhana*. (We will explore jhana in depth in a later chapter.) Those meditating in this way feel that refining their ability to remain undistracted enhances insight, and so they may turn to the practices of insight meditation only after developing concentration to a high degree.

In this book we are going to explore the third branch of meditation, in which concentration and insight are brought together as a single path of practice. In this style of meditation, concentration and insight are given equal emphasis. The aim is to develop the deeper levels of each, keeping both in mind at every step.

How to Use This Book

The practice presented here synthesizes mindfulness, concentration, and insight into a single, integrated path of meditation practice. I will offer specific guidance for cultivating both insight and concentration. This book will help you find the approaches and techniques that work best for you, offering a range of instructions for working with various possibilities of what can happen in meditation. Although no book can address every possible experience you can have in meditation, I will discuss the most common experiences that tend to arise as the meditation process unfolds, as well as a range of techniques suitable for dealing with those experiences.

Your task will be to engage in the various practices as best you can, and see what results you get. What you do next will depend on your experience from the previous practice. We do not want to

bounce around from one thing to another, but we do want to remain receptive to see if something really is not working and to be ready to let it go and try something else.

This book is designed for both beginning and experienced meditators. Even if you are experienced, I suggest reading the first couple of chapters to get a sense of how concentration and insight can come together as one path.

If you are new to meditation, see what practices you are drawn to. Some will resonate with you. Give them a try. Some you will not relate to at all. Let those go. If you do not know or have a sense of which practice to use, pick mindfulness of breathing and stay with that a while. With time and with experience you will come to know what works and what does not. In subsequent chapters I will talk about how to proceed, depending on what happens as your meditation practice develops.

You should not expect to be an expert meditator in a single day. When learning anything new, it can take patience and perseverance to see results. Do not be surprised, and do not be hard on yourself, if you find it is not easy to sit quietly with yourself. Through repetition, and some degree of trial and error, we go from those clumsy first steps to a sense of proficiency and ease.

I am often asked how much time you should devote to meditation. The answer is however much you are inclined to do and your life circumstances will allow. Many people find that beginning with fifteen to twenty minutes a day is a good way to start. Once you have gained some experience, try sitting a little longer, perhaps half an hour. See how that works for you. Some people work their way up to forty-five minutes or an hour, or more, or sit more than once a day. In general, as with anything you wish to develop, the more time you give to meditation, the more you will get out of it. Just do the best you can. Any amount of time spent sitting quietly will be of benefit.

As you begin, take some time to reflect on your aspirations and intentions for undertaking these ancient practices. You would not be drawn to meditation and Buddhist teachings if you did not want to live with more clarity, calmness, wisdom, and compassion, in a way that creates less suffering and more well-being for yourself and others.

Keeping your good intentions in mind will be a great support through all the ups and downs of a meditative life as you begin this journey of awakening, following in the Buddha's footsteps.

Chapter 1

Establishing the Foundation for Meditation

Meditation comprises a wide array of skillful means. There are many meditation practices to choose from. Even if we all undertook the same meditation practice, regardless of what that practice entailed, we would have our own individual experiences.

Though we have many things in common, we are also unique and meditation unfolds differently for each of us. As a result, how best to work and what is needed in order to proceed at each step will be different for each of us. There is no single right or best technique or approach that is suitable for everyone, and so no instruction will be appropriate for all of us in all circumstances, no method universally effective or desirable in all situations. What is most useful for one person in dealing with a particular situation or experience may not prove useful for the next person, and may actually be counterproductive.

Concentration and insight, and all the various meditation practices and techniques for developing them, rest upon the foundation of mindfulness. Mindfulness means being aware of whatever is happening in any given moment. When you are angry or worried or stressed, you know it. When you are happy and at ease, you know that. You know your internal world, the feelings in your body, your emotions, thoughts, and moods, and you are mindful of the world around you. Whatever is happening, you can be mindful of it. In the next chapter you will learn specific practices to begin applying mindfulness in meditation, starting with mindfulness of breathing.

Through the practice of mindfulness you train your mind to settle and focus by directing your attention purposefully in a skillful way, and your ability to remain collected and stable increases. Being undistracted means your awareness can remain steady, without jumping around or wandering away. We use that undistracted awareness to more clearly come to know whatever is happening moment by moment, leading to insight. Practicing mindfulness leads to

insight because you are looking directly into the nature of your own mind, body, and all experience.

Concentration and insight work together. Each can be a doorway for opening to the other. We must enlist them both, though one or the other may be emphasized at any particular time.

If you begin with concentration, you have to employ all the resources and support of mindfulness. You are making your mind steady, collected, and undistracted, so that your attention is not scattered. Your perceptions become powerful and the deepening of insight must follow.

If you emphasize insight in your meditation, you use mindfulness to investigate the conditioned and changing nature of your mind, your body, and all phenomena. You cannot help but strengthen and bring to bear the power of a steady mind. You may naturally incline in one direction or the other, but concentration and insight can never really be separated.

The more concentrated you are, the clearer and more refined your mind becomes and, because your awareness is unclouded, insights come on profound levels. A clear steady awareness illuminates your mind, allowing previously inaccessible and subtle areas of clinging and suffering to be revealed, so that you can see whether or not you truly are resting peacefully in the stream of nonclinging. Your perceptions are not only more subtle; because of concentration's penetrative power, their ability to permeate and transform you is greatly enhanced.

Sometimes you may choose to lean more on the concentration side and other times you might emphasize the deepening of insight. And sometimes meditation will take you in a direction other than what you intended. The emphasis in another direction will emerge on its own. We want to remain receptive to how our experience changes over the course of days or weeks, or throughout a single meditation session, and to be open to letting go of how we think things are supposed to be.

As your practice develops, the times when concentration is strong—when the mind is settled, clear, and sharp and it is easy to let other experiences stay in the background—will increase. During those times, remain simply with mindfulness of your breathing, or with other practices I will offer, working skillfully to strengthen the concentration, letting it run as far and deep as it can go. You will have lots of opportunities for insight to develop within the concentration practice since, through the deepening clarity concentration brings, you will naturally become more and more aware of a full range of experiences in your body and states of your mind and heart.

There will also be many times when you will not be able to concentrate. Your mind may become dull or scattered, or you may have to deal with hindrances or suffering in some way. Something you do not like will push to the forefront of your awareness and you will find yourself struggling or tense. You will naturally find yourself on the insight side of practice as you learn how to work in these situations. All of these times, when you cannot concentrate, when difficulties arise, as well as the times throughout your day outside of meditation, are rich areas for insight to grow as you learn to meet them with a quiet mind and open heart.

Even when your concentration is strong and your mind is clear and bright, you may choose to turn your attention toward investigating your experience, whether it is bringing mindfulness to meet some thought, emotion, or sensation in the body, or specifically looking for the characteristics of any experience, such as how it arises and passes away. In those times you are choosing to turn toward the insight side of the practice. You do not have to try and figure out when those times are, but can just follow your intuition where it leads you.

Dharma practice entails working skillfully with whatever is before you, with what is happening right now, right here in your experience. By remaining attuned to the natural unfolding of meditation, your experience will tell you what is needed, and whether you

are on the concentration side of the practice or when the emphasis turns to insight.

What Does a Healthy Meditation Practice Look Like?

Before starting any practice or technique, we must establish a base of Right Understanding and Right Intention and have a basic idea of what our goals are. Bringing a sense of ease to your practice will help you relax into the present moment without overstriving, allowing you to meet and work skillfully with all that can happen in meditation. If you can meet your experience with an attitude of kindness and self-compassion, you will avoid falling into self-criticism or struggle during the times of challenge. Patience prepares you for working with any hindrances that may arise. These are the foundations upon which meditation is built.

Balanced Effort

In this practice we are trying both to get somewhere and to go nowhere at all, doing two apparently contradictory things at the same time. Sometimes dharma practice is talked about in terms of "going nowhere" or "nothing to gain," so it can seem confusing when we speak of cultivating or attaining meditative states of concentration and insight. These two aspects of practice, progressing along a path and going nowhere, appear to be at odds.

You would not undertake anything if you did not want to get something from it. Of course we want to be more concentrated, more peaceful, more quiet and clear. It's okay to want that—in fact the Buddha said that the pleasure of concentration should be pursued, developed, and cultivated.

This seeming contradiction resolves itself when we understand that we are actually doing only one thing: aiming ourselves in a wholesome direction and, at the same time—at each step along the path—resting aware of and present with whatever is happening. We are moving along a path of practice by cultivating and strengthening meditative states and wholesome qualities of our mind and heart, and we do it simply by staying present with and connecting mindfully with whatever is happening, moment by moment. Getting somewhere and going nowhere are both true at the same time.

The deeper stages of concentration are not stages of gaining or doing, but profound states of letting go. How can we want something while letting go of desire for it to happen? How can we devote ourselves to a path of progress, pursue it wholeheartedly, without making it an object of craving and clinging?

Our task is to learn how to get it but not grasp for it. As your mind begins to steady and the momentum of concentration builds, you learn to apply yourself ever more skillfully, recognizing more clearly what works and what is not helpful. By remaining mindful and clearly aware, not only of what is happening but how you are relating to what is happening, mental steadiness and clarity deepen and you can stay connected with equanimity and ease. Practicing in this way, our goals for developing wholesome qualities of calm, clarity, and peace do not become corrupted into overstriving. We want to apply ourselves well, but not fall away from a peaceful abiding in the present moment into longing for something else.

Right Effort is nonstriving effort. The idea of effort often connotes a sense of hard work and a determined push. I am suggesting another approach, a balanced effort that is skillful and that has nothing to do with striving or straining and everything to do with ease and relaxation, with maintaining a sense of connecting and allowing within mindful presence.

If we think there is something we have to attain, some place we have to reach, or any experience we must get other than the one we

are having, we are out of balance; but we are also out of balance and do ourselves a disservice if we become complacent. Knowing when to make effort and when to relax and just allow is an art—an art that can take time and experience to cultivate and that comes for most people through a certain degree of trial and error. Try to let go of any expectation, resting as relaxed as you can in your present-moment experience, and then to practice in a way that naturally leads to deepening.

Ups and downs in energy, enthusiasm, and interest all come and go. At times you may notice a real decrease in wanting to meditate. Sometimes you will be motivated and sometimes you may be bored, even with pleasant meditative states. We can experience inspiring states of meditation and then feel bogged down in aversion or resistance.

When you hit a wall, sometimes the best thing to do is to keep meditating, regardless of how you feel. It can very valuable and important to sit through the hindrances. At other times it is more skillful to let go of any preconceived form, maybe going for a walk or reading instead. This is different from just following your likes and dislikes. I suggest experimenting with both approaches. If the equanimity and awareness is strong, then it does not matter what the form looks like. Just live in the flow of your experience with a mind of nonclinging. Let your inner teacher be your guide and look honestly at the results. That will inform you what is needed next.

Ease and Relaxation

It can feel especially demanding when first starting out if you are restless and it is hard to sit still, or if you keep falling asleep, or your body is not used to the sitting posture and hurts. Perhaps you can only manage one or two mindful breaths before becoming so deeply lost in thought that you completely forget about being with the breath for the next ten minutes. The typical untrained mind is out

of control; just at the time when we are the least settled, calm, or peaceful, and when we could use a lot of concentration and stability to help us be present with all these difficulties, we have these qualities the least.

Recognize that it takes practice and training for the mind to begin to settle and, just as with any art or skill, we are not going to become expert meditators in a single day. Proficiency and ability develop over time, yet many of us sit down to meditate and expect our minds to be quiet and peaceful right away. It should not surprise us that meditation can be challenging in the beginning. Our minds are not trained. Reflect on how much time you have spent on automatic pilot, led around by your likes and dislikes with a distracted mind. That is a lot of time training your mind to be scattered and not present.

Ajahn Chah, the great Thai meditation master, compared meditation practice with growing a chili bush. He said our job is to prepare the soil, plant the seed, water it, and protect it from insects. That is our whole job. We do our part, and after that how fast or in what manner it grows is not our business. You cannot pull on the leaves and expect them to grow. Yet in meditation we expect the plant to grow, flower, and produce chilies in one day.

All you can do is aim yourself in the right direction. How meditation unfolds, how quickly and in what way, is not within your control. Here is where the quality of patience will serve to support you very well. Your job is to practice the best you can, connecting with whatever experience the breath, body, and mind are giving you. You do not have to be better at meditation than you are, and that includes your capacity to let the process unfold and reveal itself in its own way. Patience and the wisdom to not suffer are among the skills you are cultivating by doing your best to let go of struggle and relax into your experience.

Ease and relaxation are foundational to meditation practice. We cannot even begin to settle if we are struggling. Consciously

beginning by bringing in a sense of relaxation and ease, just the best you can, will help you let go of constriction and tension and take the striving out of the process.

Opening to the Present Moment

Meditation practice is an exploration, a process of recognizing and fostering what is skillful and learning to let go of what is unskillful. If our practice is about learning, then we are not afraid of anything that might happen. We need not worry because whatever happens is teaching us. If we regard every experience as a teacher, we can apply ourselves with an attitude of experiment and inquiry, not judging our meditation in terms of how concentrated we are, as so many of us do, but with interest to find out what is real and true.

We can be curious, doing the best we can to meet our experience with inquisitiveness and look to see if what we are doing is helpful or unhelpful. What we learn we can apply to the next situation. Even falling into struggle is an opportunity for learning; it helps you to realize that you are unable to be equanimous in this situation. Instead of floundering in self-judgment or criticism, merely look to see what happened. Any time you discover an edge—those things, situations, and experiences you feel you cannot be with—important areas for growth are revealed. Whatever happened is teaching you, giving you information, informing you how to move forward.

A big shift came in my own practice when I got just as interested in my suffering as I was in my bliss. As my mind became less distracted, I could see more and more clearly every time something unpleasant or painful would arise and how my mind responded. I began to stop worrying about whether or not I was getting what I wanted and turned to my experience with an attitude of interest and investigation.

Let your experience of the moment be your teacher. See if you can turn directly to meet whatever is happening, even if it is painful.

That does not mean you have to stay with it, making yourself plunge into something difficult, scary, or distressing, if it is too much for you. You have to look and see what is needed, letting however much skill, experience, and wisdom you have show you the way. It may be that you choose to stay right in the fire of an uncomfortable feeling, emotion, or memory, or you may back away, bringing down the intensity to get some relief in order to give you the rest and resources you need.

If you are judging yourself or your experience, try your best to stop. Do not make it a struggle to stop struggling, but try to let it go as best you can. Sometimes it is not so easy, in which case you are learning something about conditioned patterns of tension and stress that may be deeply habituated. You may need to inquire and investigate what is fueling the tendency to hold on to some painful reaction even when you see that it is creating more suffering.

Relaxation, ease, and patience will be your allies as you learn to let go of struggle and begin to meet yourself with kindness, compassion, and a sense of exploration and experimentation. Your practice is to study and learn about yourself, and nothing need be excluded. Everything is an opportunity for learning.

We tend to judge our meditation by how pleasant or unpleasant it is. When the practice is to our liking, when it feels good and we are getting what we want, we call that a good meditation. When the present moment is not how you have decided it should be, when it seems to go badly or fall apart, check to see what you have found out about yourself, about how your mind works and about the places you get stuck. See if there is something you can let go of that is unhelpful. How can you build on what you have learned? If you can let go of judgment and contention, shifting your attitude from always seeking what you want and avoiding what you do not want, you can begin looking at what happens with interest, discerning what you can cultivate that is skillful and what is unskillful that you can let go.

In the late sixties and early seventies it was common to see posters around the San Francisco Bay Area of the Indian guru Meher Baba, with his big grin and bushy mustache and the simple caption: "Don't worry, be happy." That was in the early days of my meditation practice; I remember thinking that it was a nice sentiment, like something you might say to children, but not really all that deep. It was only much later that I was able to appreciate Meher Baba's deceptively simple teaching. As you reflect on your meditation practice and how it is going, take a few moments right now to let the words soak in and notice however they land for you: "Don't worry." "Be happy."

In beginning any practice it is helpful to try to let go of expectations. Of course, we would not take up a practice if we did not expect some results. But results come more quickly, and with less suffering, if you can practice in a way that allows you to be at peace and happy where you are, even as you aim toward a goal. Be as happy and relaxed as you can. Find the freedom in the moment while practicing in a way that heads in a skillful direction.

Sometimes it may feel like you are working very hard, but even in those times you can learn to rest and relax. Check if there is any tension or constriction in your body. Try to relax those areas. Do you find some sense that you have got to change your experience? See if you can let that go and relax into whatever is happening. This is Right Effort, being fully in the present while naturally heading toward more peace, clarity, and awareness, getting somewhere and going nowhere.

After a few months on one long retreat I complained to the teacher that I had not yet reached jhana, which I had previously attained by this point. At that time I had already been meditating for more than thirty years, having sat many retreats of various lengths along with a strong daily practice. I had attained jhana in about four or five weeks of intensive meditation, so going into this retreat I thought, *This is going to be great! I'll be in jhana in a month or two at*

the most, and then proceed from there to even deeper stages of concentration, insight, and liberation.

The teacher asked if I could be perfectly happy and at ease if I never attained jhana again, and kindly pointed out that real freedom is found not in attainments, but in nonclinging to whatever is happening. I remember answering with something like, "Yes, of course that is true, but in order to deeply realize that fact I've got to get…" and then proceeding to suffer and struggle for some time more. I'd had it all planned out. I knew that any time the thought *I've got to get* comes up about anything, it is a setup for suffering. But what had been a wholesome aspiration had become hijacked by my greedy mind.

All the parts of yourself and all the patterns at work in your life come with you as you begin to meditate. Just as we are liable to suffer when we do not get what we want in the course of daily life, even with the most sincere intentions we can fall into worry, stress, or fear as the meditation process unfolds. This is all part of the learning process as we get to see how our minds work. You do not have to be free from patterns of negativity in order to begin meditation, but you do need the tools to work with whatever meditation presents.

Working with Hindrances

You cannot meditate without any problems or difficulties ever arising. From time to time all of us will be troubled by sleepiness, restlessness, worry, desire, aversion, or doubt, and we need to find ways to navigate these challenges when they assail our minds.

When engaging in any form of meditation, mindfulness is the way to deal with these hindrances effectively. Often we cannot simply concentrate or focus our minds to push through problems. Through meditation we are cultivating a stable, clear awareness that bolsters our inner resources to meet these hindrances. When concentration is strong and our minds are settled, there are not so many distractions, and if unpleasant experiences do arise they do not

bother us. When concentration is quite strong the hindrances cannot arise at all. Concentration suppresses the hindrances, but until it is well developed we need to find ways to set the hindrances aside enough to be able to get into concentration and jhana. When the concentration is not strong there is a range of skillful means, various approaches and techniques, for dealing with hindrances.

Often just being mindful that a hindrance has arisen is enough to loosen its grip and enable us to let it go. Experiences become hindrances only when they are stronger than our ability to meet them with equanimity. There is something about their quality that catches our minds; they become problems that we tend to struggle with and get caught in. When we are mindful and clearly aware of what is happening, we are often able to meet the same challenges with a calm, nonreactive presence.

Sometimes mindfulness alone will not be enough to enable us to act effectively when we encounter problems. At such times we must find other ways to work with them. We may need to find ways to bring down their intensity if they are too strong for us, or to suppress them or let them go.

Antidotes are ways of directing our attention in order to release a hindrance or have it fade away. If we are holding on to something pleasant, sometimes reflecting on impermanence—reminding ourselves that this experience will not last—can help us let it go. Conversely, if we are aware of something unpleasant and are experiencing aversion, perhaps consciously bringing some loving-kindness to the situation, to ourselves, or to whatever the object is can help.

In dealing with sloth and torpor we can look for ways to increase our energy. You may need more rest—a nap could help. Or try standing up during the meditation; open your eyes and take some deeper breaths. If you are restless, with your mind scattered and unable to focus, try bringing up the effort more. Or you may need to take a walk or do some other kind of movement to help get the excess energy out.

Doubt, which can be the most insidious of the hindrances, colors our perception and undermines our ability to discern that a hindrance has arisen. We are liable to become identified with the doubt, believing our thoughts that the practice does not work or that we cannot do it. We may need to talk with a friend or teacher to get a more objective perspective; or to spend time with a dharma community (whether in person or with a "virtual community" online); or to read inspiring books or listen to talks. Find whatever supports you.

Hindrances are going to happen for all of us. When they attack and are quite strong, and you have tried various strategies and nothing seems to work, your practice will be to know that that is the way it is for you. Sometimes the best we can do is bring some compassion to ourselves for all the times we get caught up in struggle or forget.

Self-Compassion

I remember my beginning days as a meditator, wondering what it was going to be like if something ever started to happen. I was young, naïve, and idealistic, and looking around the meditation hall, seeing everyone sitting so still, looking like perfect Buddhas, I thought, *Look at them all. Everybody is blissed out but me*. I imagined everyone in transcendent states of ecstasy as I grappled with knee pain, a mind that could not stay on the breath, and thoughts of inadequacy. It is so easy to fall into judging ourselves and comparing with others, and we can end up creating a lot of unnecessary suffering along this path whose purpose is to take us to the end of suffering.

It is often taught that morality is the foundation for beginning any meditation practice. Morality entails speaking, thinking, and acting in wholesome ways that decrease stress and increase well-being in ourselves and others. A standard Buddhist model to guide us in this way is the five precepts: nonharming, not stealing or not taking that which does not belong to us, care not to cause harm around sexuality, wise and careful speech, and abstaining from

intoxication that leads to heedlessness. There is no doubt of the critical importance a moral basis has in creating a healthy and supportive environment for our meditation to flourish.

But even more fundamental than morality is self-compassion. Self-compassion understands that we each have our own suffering, that each of us is a unique blend of strengths and weaknesses, and it allows us to be present with our suffering without adding negative self-judgment or blame.

We see how simple the instructions for beginning meditation are. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. Sit any way you wish that will allow you to remain relatively still in a relaxed way (you can even lie down). You do not have to make anything happen, but just be mindful of whatever *is* happening. Yet we soon discover how difficult this simple process can be.

Some amount of physical and mental discomfort inevitably comes when we set aside our usual distractions and concerns to just sit quietly and be present with ourselves. Our bodies ache, or our feelings—of unworthiness, shame, fear, guilt, trying to please others, or any of the many other psychological and emotional difficulties so many of us contend with—can come roaring up at any time.

We can be quite critical or judgmental, thinking that we really are not doing any of this very well and falling into adversarial relationships with our experience and ourselves. When difficulties arise we tend to think something is going wrong, or that we are not trying hard enough or are not doing it the right way. But if you could meditate better you would. If you could concentrate better you would. If you could be less distracted or meditate more often, then you would.

Self-compassion allows us relax more, to understand that we are trying our best (even though it may not feel that way to us), that the forces that distract us or pull us to waste time are very real, and that sometimes, despite our best efforts, we do not get the results we want.

We do not have to know how to have self-compassion; we just have to be open to the possibility of self-compassion, learning to stay

present to our experience with an open heart without judgment or blame. Even in the beginning we can start to bring equanimity toward our experience and our self.

Experimental Attitude

A skilled carpenter never reaches for a hammer when he needs to tighten a screw; he works seamlessly and with ease with whatever situation is presented. He doesn't fret or judge that the screw is not a nail, but concerns himself with completing his job well. We need a range of skillful means at our disposal, adding many tools to our tool kit over time and with experience, and learning how to use them confidently and effectively. Instead of feeling oppressed by a situation, complaining when things are not going our way and struggling against ourselves, we can avoid a lot of stress by letting go of our ideas of how things should be and turning with interest to meet whatever our meditation is presenting us.

By attending directly to whatever is happening, your experience will tell you what is needed and how to proceed. If you become stuck in a fixed idea of what is supposed to happen when you sit to meditate, you can fall into a struggle with your experience and yourself. Becoming a skilled meditator means learning to meet even challenging situations with interest and curiosity. We can get just as interested in our struggles and sufferings as we can in our bliss. Sometimes we will want to investigate the situation, verbally or nonverbally. Sometimes all we need is to be present and wait as the situation unfolds.

Meditation, therefore, involves a degree of experimentation, trial and error, engaging in the practice and seeing what actually happens, not seeking some prescribed set of experiences we are told should happen. Whatever happens really is just fine. Even when things seem to go wrong, the present moment is giving us information, informing us how to proceed in the next step.

All you have to do is stay open and receptive to what your experience is telling you. When your mind is steady and clear and nothing else is calling for your attention, continue cultivating the concentration. There will be plenty of times when you cannot concentrate or you are dealing with other experiences or you just sense that you should turn toward and investigate what is happening in some way. At those times, simply follow out the investigation without worrying about concentration, working as skillfully as you can with whatever the moment brings. In this way, you never have to choose between when to do concentration and when to do insight practice, and you can take both as far and deep as you wish.

As meditation progresses the instructions will begin to differ for each of us, depending not only on what happens, but also on what we are learning about our strengths and challenges in working with those experiences. When the practice is difficult or painful, we work skillfully with the pain. When the mind is calm, collected, and concentrated, we work skillfully with the pleasure.

Bringing an open, receptive attitude will be a tremendous support in deepening your capacity for working with the unfolding stages of meditation. The receptive attitude is not afraid of anything that might happen. It only looks to see what actually is happening and how we can work with it most skillfully.

Think of each meditation practice as a doorway into the same inner sanctuary. We do not want to become preoccupied with a particular door, thinking ours is the best or the only way—there can be many. It does not matter which you choose. Once you have stepped through that doorway you will guide and steer the practices so they begin to converge at one place, which is a synthesis and integration of concentration and insight. How we get there will differ from one person to the next, because each practice can bring its own result and the experiences each of us have, even if we are all doing the same practice, will vary. So at each stage I will offer a range of techniques and possible ways to work with each practice in order to head

them in the same direction. I will offer various practices you might try, starting with mindfulness of breathing meditation. Through experimentation and experience, along with the guidance presented here, you will find what quiets your mind and opens your heart, what brightens mindful awareness and deepens connection with your body and mind.

You will learn to meditate so the mind becomes more collected and centered, leading ultimately to the deepest stages of concentration. At the same time, you will be guided so that mindfulness and clear awareness of all experiences are strengthened, regardless of the level of concentration present—so that insight can flourish. Awareness will be guided to open into mindfulness of your body and of the states of your heart and mind, revealing and deeply connecting with all aspects of your experience.

Ultimately, you must rely on your intuition and best judgment on how to proceed. You engage in some meditation practice to which you are drawn, or which you are taught by a teacher you happen to encounter or read about in books, and then you undertake that practice to the best of your ability and assess the results as best you can. With time and experience you will come to know what you can trust. But in order to learn how to rely on your own inner guidance you have to try out the instructions, put them into practice, and see what the results are.

Chapter 2

Beginning Instructions

It can be helpful to establish an environment that is relatively free from distraction. As your meditation practice develops and your ability to calm your mind and remain mindfully present strengthens, it will not matter when or where you choose to practice. You will be able to meditate in any situation. Especially in the beginning, though, finding a time and place relatively free from noise or commotion can be a great support.

Pick any place you like to sit quietly for the duration of the meditation period. It does not have to be perfectly quiet. Just do the best you can with whatever situation you have to work with. You can meditate at any time of day, early in the morning, late at night, or during a lunch break—whenever feels best and your schedule will allow.

Perhaps turning off your phone will support you to let go of thinking about messages or other distractions. Some people use a timer to end the sitting period so they do not have to think about when to end. It is okay to use a clock, but be careful not to fall into peeking at the time too often. Or you can meditate without timing the period at all, simply sitting however long you wish. See what works best to help you be more fully present for the meditation.

When the meditation period is over, you can get up whenever you feel ready. You may want to remain sitting a short while to reconnect with and transition to your surroundings. Sometimes this helps to carry the meditative awareness back to your ordinary activities. Or you can get up right away.

We will begin with the simple practice of mindfulness of breathing, connecting with our experience of the breath wherever in the body we can feel it most easily and clearly. We will pay attention to how the practice unfolds, using whatever actually happens to inform what is needed at the next step.

It may be obvious that mindfulness of breathing is a good fit for you or it may not be clear or easy to figure out. Give it some time. Just because you cannot concentrate well on your breath does not

mean it is not a good meditation subject for you to work with. Often, it simply means that your mind is not yet trained, so do not be too quick to give up on the breath and switch to something else. What happens as we meditate will be different for each of us, and we each have our own strengths and ways of working.

If, after trying out mindfulness of breathing for a while, you feel drawn to one of the subsequent practices I offer, feel free to give it a try. Mindfulness of breathing is not the best practice for everyone. Find a style of meditation that you feel drawn to do.

Mindfulness of Breathing: Our Foundational Meditation Practice

Begin meditation practice very simply, with mindfulness of breathing, by resting your attention at some place in the body where you can feel your breathing easily and clearly. The breath is our teacher; we are learning how to be present with something as we connect mindfully with the experience of breathing just as it is happening now.

Sit in a way that is relaxed and upright with as much ease and comfort as possible, finding the balance between not straining to sit straight and not slumping. Your posture does not have to be very formal; you can be in a chair, or in a cross-legged position on a cushion, or on a meditation bench on the floor. If you have back problems you could even lie down as long as you are able to stay alert and not get sleepy.

If you are new to meditation it may require some experimentation to find a posture that best supports you to sit for the duration of the meditation period with as little pain as possible. Our bodies will not allow some of us to be comfortable regardless of the position we choose, so just do the best you can to find a posture that will allow you to sit quietly without moving too often.

Let your eyes close in a relaxed way and take a few moments to feel your body sitting. Notice that you do not have to do much and that the experience of your body, in whatever position it is in, is easily known just by paying attention in this very simple way. Some people think meditation is complicated or mysterious, but the foundation of our entire practice is simply opening to, and mindfully connecting with, our experience in order to meet each moment just as it presents itself.

Bring your awareness to your body breathing. As you pay attention to your body, you can become aware of your breathing in a simple, uncomplicated way. This is not thinking about your breathing or analyzing it, but just resting your attention on the direct, bare experience. Try to let go of your judgments or opinions—*This breath is not clear enough*, *This is not right breathing*—and see how you can become more receptive to the pure simplicity of each breath.

Check in with your body to see where you naturally and most clearly feel the physical sensations of breathing. It could be at the nose, in the abdomen, or whole-body breathing—all are part of the body. Give emphasis to mindfulness of breathing, letting other experiences stay in the background of your awareness as much as possible without struggling to do so. Try not to control the breath, but let the body breathe at its own rhythm. We are not trying to make the breath be any special way. The body knows how to breathe all on its own, breathing itself without you having to make it happen.

Find where your attention naturally wants to settle and stay with that. We do not want to be jumping around from one place to another. It does not matter where in the body you connect with your breathing. All places work equally well to cultivate even the deepest stages of concentration and insight; the key is to find the place where you naturally feel your breathing most clearly and easily, without strain. If you do not have an obvious preference, try bringing your attention to the area of your nose, feeling the air going in and out. For some people, concentration strengthens more quickly

and sharply by focusing their attention there, though that is not true for everyone.

Later, as your meditation evolves and concentration deepens, your awareness may naturally be drawn on its own to other areas in your body. When that happens, don't fight yourself, but simply follow your experience, let it unfold and present itself to you. This is not jumping around, but is following the organic progression. For now, keep it simple and stay with your breathing in one place.

Do not move your attention to follow the breath from the nose down into the chest and back up. Being mindful of breathing at the nose is sometimes likened to a saw cutting wood. The saw's long blade moves back and forth, but only touches the log at one place. Air moves from the outside to deep in the lungs; though it "touches" the body in more than one place, we do not follow it with our attention from the nose down into the lungs. Let your awareness rest at one place, either just inside the nostrils or anywhere deeper inside the nasal passage area. Try it out and let your attention fall wherever in the area of the nose you naturally feel the breath.

You may feel your body breathing most clearly by noticing the rising and falling of your abdomen. In this case you are not feeling the sensation of air, but the physical movement of your belly expanding and contracting with each in-breath and out-breath. Again, let your body breathe at its own pace, as deeply or shallowly as it wishes, and let your awareness rest on the physical sensations of the belly rising and falling.

Variation: Whole-Body Breathing

Another way to practice is called "whole-body" breathing. This does not mean trying to feel the breath everywhere in your body, including the arms and legs, but entails widening your mindful awareness to include the experience of breathing at the nose, chest, and abdomen—the whole torso all at once, rather than focusing narrowly

just at the nose or the abdomen. You may not feel your breathing in all these places, and it is fine if you notice the breath at some places in your body but not at others. For example, you may feel breathing at your chest and abdomen but not the nose. Let the sensations of breath present themselves to you naturally, not trying to make yourself feel them in any particular way.

It may be immediately obvious where you feel your breath best or you may need to experiment, spending some time following your breathing at each of these places. If you are not sure, just pick one of these styles and stick with it for a while to see how well it works.

Later we will talk about working with all the other experiences that can arise—the range of body sensations, sounds, thoughts, and moods that pull our attention and that can make it hard to stay with the breath. For now, give emphasis to awareness of the breath, not clinging to it or pushing away any other experiences, just with a strong preference for that particular awareness while letting other experiences remain in the background. Stay relaxed the best you can.

Continue practicing in this way, returning to the physical experience of breathing over and over again. In the following chapters we will talk about some of the common ways meditation can unfold and how to work with our experience in each case. For now, just stay with your breath in a simple way. Later, as the practice unfolds, we will pay attention to what happens, which will inform the next steps. As we emphasized in the previous chapter, there is no one-size-fits-all instruction for what to do next. We will not know until we see how the practice unfolds and what actually happens.

When the Mind Wanders

At any time, but especially in the early stages of practice when our minds are not trained, the mind can have a tendency to wander

away in thoughts of planning, worry, or fantasy, completely forgetting to be with the breath. This is to be expected; it's the nature of an untrained mind. One of the first insights we have is the realization of how out of control our minds are.

You cannot stop your mind from wandering. Such wandering is natural and it will happen many, many times. Remember to stay relaxed and do not struggle to remain present and connected. Once you realize you have forgotten about your breath you are already back, so just start again and stay with your breathing the best you can. Meditation is a process of returning over and over, each time you drift away. Try not to create a problem or beat yourself up because you have wandered away again.

Mental Noting

You can try experimenting with mental noting, an aid that helps direct the attention to remain present with the breath. Some people find this technique very helpful to stay more connected and consistent with mindful breathing and not wander off so much, while others find it unhelpful or unwieldy. If the latter is the case with you, just let it go and continue simply with the bare experience of breathing.

Mentally repeat the words *in* and *out* with each in-breath and out-breath, keeping most of your attention on the sensation of breathing itself and letting the words remain soft and in the background of your awareness. If you are mindful of your breathing at the abdomen, you can use the words *rising* and *falling* with each rise and fall of your belly, or simply *breathing, breathing*, with each whole-body in-breath and out-breath.

Mala

Just as mental noting is an internal aid, a mala is an external aid to help keep the breath in mind. The mala is a string of beads of any

size and length that is comfortable to pass between your thumb and any other finger. If you use a mala as an accompaniment to breathing meditation, a single bead marks each complete in-and-out breath cycle. Place your thumb on the bead with the in-breath and pull it across your finger with the out-breath. Just as with mental noting, you may or may not find the mala helpful to stay more present with the breath.

Breathing, mental noting, and the mala can all be used together, giving your mind three things to do at once, all pointing toward one thing, mindfulness of breathing. You can coordinate mental noting and the tactile experience of moving the beads by grabbing the bead with the *in* note and pulling it across your finger with the *out*, always keeping the physical experience of breathing foremost in your awareness.

These props, mental noting and the mala, will begin to feel cumbersome at some point as your concentration strengthens. The very supports that you may have found so helpful early on will have done their job and you will need, and want, to let them go. Feel free to use them as much as you like for now, especially when you need lots of support, but be watchful to not become attached or reliant after their useful time has passed.

Alternative Meditation Practices

The breath is commonly taught as a universal meditation subject, suitable for everyone. But for some people the breath is not a good object to work with. I knew a man who had a choking incident as a child, and paying attention to his breathing brought up feelings of anxiety. Another person with asthma found that she became tense whenever she focused on the breath. If you are one for whom the breath does not work well, there is nothing wrong; this will not

hinder your ability to meditate. It's just a matter of finding the right practice in these early stages to substitute for breath meditation.

Here are some techniques you can try if you think mindfulness of breathing is not a good practice for you. These common alternatives are not the only methods that can substitute for mindful breathing, but the full range of possibilities is beyond our scope here.

Mindfulness of Sound

In the instructions for mindfulness of breathing we let all other experiences stay in the background of our awareness, not forcing or pushing them away but bringing a gentle sense of allowing them to be in the background while giving some preference or predominance to awareness of our breathing. In the same way, with this practice we allow other experiences to stay in the background and we give preference or predominance to the experience of sound. You may feel a natural draw or pull to awareness of hearing, and this practice can be very calming and settling. Those for whom mindfulness of sound works well commonly report it as an easily accessible and even compelling meditation object. You may be drawn to awareness of the sounds themselves or you may be more naturally aware of the act or the process of listening or hearing.

Mindfulness of sound entails working with either inner or outer sound. Even though it may be very quiet where you are meditating, you may feel drawn to rest your awareness in listening to however many or few sounds may be present at any time. Other people hear an inner sound: a clear perception of ringing or some other sound, experienced not through the ears but in the mind. You can see if you have such an experience and if you are drawn to rest in awareness of inner or outer sound.

If you are working with mental noting, you can mentally repeat *hearing* or *sound* if that helps you stay connected and centered with

the auditory experience. If you practice mindfulness of sound, just substitute *hearing* every time I use the terms *breath* or *breathing.*

Touch Points

Pick a few places in your body—touch points through which you cycle your attention. They can be any place. For example, you could choose the feeling of your hands touching together or wherever they are resting on your thighs or knees, the feeling of your lips touching, and the feeling of your bottom pressing against the chair, cushion, or bench. It does not matter where in your body you choose, as long as they are places where you can feel some sensation easily and clearly.

Place your attention at one of these points and rest it there for a few moments, however long you wish—maybe as long as two, three, or five breaths—making a mental note of *touching, touching* if you are using noting. When you are ready, move your attention to the next place, and then the next, continuing to cycle through your touch points in this way. You do not have to bring awareness of breathing into the process, though you can if you wish. If so, experiment with how awareness of breathing can help deepen your connection with touch points.

Body Scan

Body scan involves sweeping your attention systematically through your body, generally moving down through your body (though you can move up if that is more natural for you) and placing your awareness at each place for a few seconds or longer. As you move your attention through your body, you may have a lot of sensation at a particular place or just a general sense of having your attention there without any particular sensation being noticeable.

For example, if you start at the top of your head, rest your awareness there and when you are ready slowly move your attention down through your head. You could spend a lot of time, going into detail, putting your attention into many parts of your face, the back of your head, the sides, and so on; or just experience a general sense of moving your awareness through your head without spending time in so many detailed places.

When you are ready, finding your natural pace, continue moving your awareness slowly through your head, neck, and down into your shoulders, paying attention to each place in as much or as little detail as you wish. You may or may not put your awareness individually down through the arms. Continue in this way down through your torso, possibly in your chest or back or just a general sense through your torso, and so on, moving your awareness all the way down through your legs and into your feet. When you are ready, start again, move your attention back to the top of your head and repeat the body-scanning process throughout your meditation session.

Mantra Meditation

Mantra meditation involves choosing some word, sound, or phrase that is repeated mentally over and over again. The words or phrases may or may not have meaning. You may have heard mantras chanted out loud, but as we are teaching here, all mantras should only be repeated mentally. In this way of practice, just as with the breath or sound, give strong preference to repeating the mantra and let all other experiences stay in the background.

This is a very powerful, concentrating practice if it is the right practice for you. You may already know some mantras you want to try, or you could just pick something now. For example, you could pick the name of the Buddha, and repeat *Buddha, Buddha*, over and over again. And, while it is not necessary, you could coordinate the

mantra with your breathing, repeating *Bud* on the in-breath and *dha* on the out-breath, and similarly for any other mantra you might be working with. You can use a mala to help you stay present and connected with the mantra, whether or not you coordinate the mantra with your breathing.

An example of mantra practice is the way that *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation is often taught, which is through the use of phrases of loving-kindness. Pick one, two, or three phrases of loving-kindness, which could be directing loving-kindness to yourself or to others. For example, you could repeat *May I be happy* or *May you be happy* or *May you be peaceful* or *May you be safe*. These are just some examples of phrases of loving-kindness; you can make up your own. Repeat the phrases over and over, rotating through them one by one, and this mantra repetition can become the foundation for your meditation. Let that be the vehicle to take you into deeper states of concentration.

Practicing metta in this way brings all the concentration power that repeating mantras offers, but because the phrases have meaning, that meaning comes in and becomes extra empowered through the use of the mantra.

As you begin to work with any of these practices, try to incorporate a feeling of balance and ease into your meditation. For now, do not worry about anything else except establishing a connection, a relationship, with your primary practice—breath, sound, body scan, touch points, or mantra. Gently bring your attention back, over and over, to reconnect when your attention has wandered away.

In the coming chapters you will learn to practice so that mindfulness, insight, and concentration are integrated. We are not only learning to flow seamlessly between concentration and insight, we will bring insight into even the deep states of concentration. Mindfulness comes up to meet whatever level of concentration you have, so that awareness of the body, mind, and heart is retained and

the opportunity for insight is never lost. In this way insight meditation is right there along with the concentration.

A steady, undistracted awareness that lets us see when we really are resting at peace within the ever-changing experience of our life is the goal of a balanced and unified practice. Without chasing after or pushing away anything, and doing nothing that takes you away from yourself or out of your experience, aim toward clarity and calm. Let every experience be your teacher.

Chapter 3

As Concentration Begins to Grow

At some point you will begin to experience the first "aha" moments of meditation, as concentration begins to strengthen, as undistractedness deepens and grows. It may only be for short periods, but sooner or later there will be a noticeable shift in your consciousness. The change may be slight in the beginning, but you will clearly feel calmer, more peaceful or still, perhaps in ways you have never touched before.

As you hear this, be careful not to fall into comparing or judging your meditation or yourself if your mind is not settling down and you are still waiting to taste some of these experiences. Maybe you are wondering if anything is ever going to happen for you. Try to relax and let things unfold in their own time.

You do not want to chase after some experience you think you are supposed to have or to fall into struggle trying to have someone else's experience. Do not try to make anything happen, but be mindful about whatever actually is happening. What is important, and what to get interested in, is your own experience, the unique expression of how meditation unfolds for you—and that includes not yet noticing any effects from your efforts.

The unfolding of meditation can express itself in lots of ways. How is it you know you are starting to concentrate and to settle more deeply into the meditation? You know because you are having some kind of experience that is telling you so. Though you will not have to wonder if meditation is deepening—it will be obvious—the progression of meditation and the many experiences that can come with it are highly individual and can vary greatly from one person to the next.

You may feel expansive, as if your body or mind has become vast and spacious. A concentrated mind can feel very pleasant and even blissful, and the pleasant sensations can be experienced in the body, or as mental phenomena, or as not clearly located any place in particular. Some people begin to experience feelings of warmth or

energy moving in their body. Others see lights or images, or hear inner sounds. These sounds and images can be easily recognizable and familiar, or they may be vague and not clearly formed. For some, deepening concentration brings a wonderful heart opening, where you are filled with kindness, compassion, or love extending unconditionally to yourself and others. These are among the experiences of concentration, any of which can be dramatic and strong, or smooth and light.

By now you have no doubt seen how hard it can be simply to sit quietly with yourself. If your mind is spinning out of control, you may have wondered, *What is the point of all this?* When you feel restless or your body aches, it can take real commitment to stay with the practice. Challenges can arise any time in meditation, but it can be especially difficult when we do not have the support of a clear, steady mind.

Now you gain confidence that the practice works and that you can really do it. The building momentum starts to do some of the work for you, strengthening and sustaining your ability to meet whatever might happen. It feels like more of the practice is happening on its own and you don't have to put in so much effort to make it happen.

Sustained and encouraged by these initial experiences, you will begin to feel closer, more familiar with your breathing. Where perhaps you were bored or restless, now you can be interested. What is this breath? Where is the deepening process leading? Now is the time to begin discovering how your practice can be more intimate, letting the felt sense, the nonconceptual experiential knowing of the breath, strengthen and grow.

See how long you can stay present and aware of the whole breath. Connect with the full cycle of breath, feeling the beginning, staying with it in the middle and through to the end. Notice the pause before the beginning of the out-breath and stay with that all the way to the pause before the next in-breath. Experiment and explore how you

can be even more fully in contact, more fully immersed in the sensations of your breathing, letting it capture your attention and fill your awareness.

As meditation progresses, our practice can begin to shift and reveal itself to us in new ways. We must be ready to let go of how things have been, and open to how the moment is presenting itself with fresh interest and curiosity.

Foreground and Background

Sometimes, without your doing anything to make it happen, you will feel the concentration experiences more strongly than the breath. You will be more clearly aware of the peace, the stillness, the expansiveness, the energies, or the pleasantness than you are of the sensations of breathing. Whatever your concentration experiences are, they are naturally predominating and popping out to your awareness, even though you can still clearly feel the physical experience of your breath, or whatever other meditation practice you may be doing. When that happens, if that happens, you do not have to do anything about it at that point. Mindfully know that that is the way the meditation is presenting itself and continue on with your practice as you have been.

At other times your experience may unfold in just the opposite way. Even though the experiences of concentration may be strong, the physical sensations of breathing become more prominent and you will feel them more easily and naturally than you will the concentration. Again, you do not have to do anything except notice that that is how the meditation is expressing itself, and continue practicing as you have been, just staying with your breathing.

Deepening meditation can manifest in a third way, where you are more or less equally aware of the experiences of concentration and the sensations of the breath, the sound, the touch points, or the

mantra. Sometimes the experiences of concentration and breathing can go beyond just being equal in your awareness and begin to feel merged or mixed into one new experience that cannot easily be separated. There is no longer a clear boundary between experiences of concentration and experiences of breathing, and you open to a new blended "concentration-breath" experience. Do not worry if it is hard to conceive what this blended experience might be like—it will be obvious to you if it happens. The goal is not to make this happen, but if it does, then let this new unified experience be the object of your meditation.

It may not be obvious how the concentration and the breath are unfolding in relation to each other, or whether you are feeling the breath or the concentration more strongly. It is not important to figure it out. Do not stir up your mind looking for it or get too involved in figuring out what is happening. If you are not aware of it naturally, check in now and then, perhaps a couple of times during a sitting period. But mostly simply continue with the practice of mindful breathing.

Broadening and Narrowing the Lens of Awareness

Like a camera lens zooming in and out, our awareness can expand and contract. Sometimes your awareness may feel very narrowly focused. All your attention will center on the breath and you will not pay much attention to other things going on around you. At other times your mind may be quite open and spacious, allowing other body sensations, thoughts, emotions, and sounds to be known along with the breath. And sometimes you may not have a clear sense of your awareness being either narrow or broad.

When your awareness narrows, you may not notice much else outside the meditation subject. If you are connecting with your

breathing at the nose, for example, it can feel like you are concentrated in just this area, without noticing much else beyond. Other times you can feel just the opposite, like awareness is more open and inclusive of a broad range of experiences. The lens has been widened. Even though you may still be quite concentrated on the breath, there is also a broader awareness around the main meditation object.

This feeling of being narrowly or broadly focused can happen on its own, but you can also choose to narrow or widen your attention, moving in whichever direction helps you remain present and connected. It is fine to experiment some and get to know the different flavors. There is not a right or wrong setting for the lens of awareness.

Shifting Attention

So far the instructions have mainly been to keep bringing your attention back to your breath whenever your mind wanders. Continue practicing in this way, stabilizing and strengthening the connection with your breathing at the same place where you have been resting your attention all along.

The more present and undistracted your mind is, the more aware you will be of anything that happens. You can become more connected and concentrated on your breath and at the same time open increasingly to awareness of other experiences. Perception of your inner and outer world heightens and all that goes on in your body and mind is naturally known within a wider field of awareness around the central object of the breath or other primary meditation object. Any sensations in your body and experiences in your mind are easily and effortlessly known.

As you settle more deeply, your body may become very relaxed and still, so there might be less happening in your body to be aware of, but anything that does arise will clearly be known. As the

progression of awareness gets even subtler, you will plainly perceive what is happening in your mind. Whatever happens, you will know it, whether your mind is contracted or expansive, concentrated or unconcentrated, grasping and clinging or equanimous and relaxed.

Do not bounce around from one place in your body to another, or from one practice to another. Practices such as body scan or touch points, which purposefully cycle through points of attention, are fine. That is not jumping around.

But you should remain receptive to the natural progression and allow the process to reveal itself in its own way. Your attention may naturally be pulled in new directions, and you should not force yourself to stay with your breath at one place if the movement elsewhere is clear and strong. Follow the natural, organic progression as the practice unfolds.

You may find that your attention wants to go to another area in your body or that something else is capturing your interest. An area you are not observing can suddenly pop out in your awareness. Sometimes you may find that the awareness naturally wants to settle on the breath at the abdomen, some days on the entire body, and some days on the nose.

Deepening concentration can move beyond the breath, manifesting in many different ways. Subtle, nonphysical sensations, such as feelings of energy, can become prominent. These kinds of experiences can open to and merge with the body, or they can become disembodied.

Do not struggle to stay with your breath where you originally started, but follow where it naturally leads. Bring a sense of experimentation and openness to see and learn where the meditation wants to take you. See what happens when you allow your awareness to follow its natural unfolding. It may stay in the new area or it may change again on its own.

If you become more agitated by allowing your attention to move, bring it back to the original object. See what results you get by

following the natural progression. Look to see what disturbs your mind and what helps it settle more deeply.

If you feel restless or sleepy it is fine to shift your attention elsewhere, away from the breath to some other place in your body, or even to sound, if you find it helps. That is not jumping around. It is being skillful. It is important to find what works and what supports you best in any situation. There will always be times when we need to let go of the practice we are doing and use some other skillful means. Once you feel settled again, come back to your main practice.

More Subtle Awareness

As your awareness becomes more refined, you may begin to notice ever more subtle details of the sensations within the experience of your breathing. If you are mindful of breathing at your abdomen, you may notice the rising and falling movement in more detail, such as slight variations in pressure or whether you feel the sensations more clearly in one part of the belly than another. At the nose you may become aware that the in-breath is cool and the out-breath warmer, or begin to notice many slight shifts in sensation. You may feel tickling or notice the moving air more clearly at one place in your nose than another.

This enhanced perception of body and breath sensations can arise naturally as a fruit of meditation. It is fine if more detail and subtler experiences in the breath become apparent on their own, and that does happen for some people.

Sometimes you may choose to bring mindfulness to these subtler sensations, but in general do not go looking. Bringing this investigative attitude to the breath will strengthen concentration to a certain degree, but seeking out all the little sensations associated with your breathing is too much mental activity, too much doing, to be

conducive to the deepest stages of concentration. For now, just connect with the physical sensations of breathing in a simple way and allow your experience to develop and reveal itself as it will on its own.

Building Mindfulness

A key to integrating concentration and insight is cultivating and strengthening mindfulness at every stage, from the first glimmers of steadiness and peace to the subtlest states of concentration. If you want to travel due north, you might be heading only a tiny fraction of a degree off course and not notice any difference for a long time; only once you have traveled very far will your direction really start to diverge. A very small variance in the beginning will become a very large difference over a long time, and you may end up in an entirely different place.

Your sense of direction need not be perfect. The mountain you are aiming toward comes in and out of sight many times in the course of a journey. When it is out of sight you use your best sense of direction to head roughly the right way. Once you crest the next hill and the mountain is again in plain view you can fine-tune your course.

Similarly, we are applying mindfulness in every aspect of meditation, even in little ways in the beginning, so it will strengthen and grow, coming with us as an ally and rising up to meet whatever level of concentration is there. Then it does not matter what kind of concentration we have or how strong it is, because mindfulness is always there to meet it.

The simple instructions of checking in occasionally to be aware of how the concentration experiences are unfolding in relation to the breath, or whether our attention is narrow or wide, are part of the training for bringing mindfulness and clear comprehension into the meditation process. Beginning in the earliest stages we are

starting to notice what is happening. Our practice can lead in many directions and, depending on how it naturally unfolds, we may let it progress on its own or we may direct the meditation to proceed along a different path. As we become more attuned to how our practice is unfolding, we will be able to make clear choices in how we may want to steer the instructions and work with the progression of concentration and insight.

Balance

The experiences of concentration can be compelling when they are strong. It can feel very pleasant when your mind starts to calm down. When your mind settles even a little bit you begin to feel more complete and satisfied, your heart and mind nurtured and your body replenished. Meditation can become delightful, even sensual, for some people, and we tend to like it a lot. When this happens you do not have to stop liking it or deny the experience in some way. Include the pleasure you feel in meditating in your mindfulness. Continue to follow it and let it build. Notice how you feel the pleasure in your body and in your breathing. Learning how to use pleasant feelings is an important skill. Let the pleasure draw you more fully into the experience of breathing.

However, because these experiences can be so alluring, it is easy to become fascinated by them and overlook the most important part and the main reason we want to become concentrated: the undistracted awareness itself. It is especially important to distinguish between these two main aspects of a concentrated mind, the clear, steady awareness and the experiences that can happen within that awareness. In the same way that we can lose our mindfulness and get lost in whatever is happening in daily life, we can be pulled into and caught up in the happiness, peace, and pleasure of meditation. This can happen to any of us and should be viewed as another of the

many situations we will encounter and learn to navigate in the life cycle of our meditation practice. Bringing attentiveness to our experience and how it unfolds starts to strengthen the mindfulness and clear awareness, which will carry into the stronger experiences of concentration we will discuss later.

Do not go after or push away any part of the breath. Stay mindful and aware, in a relaxed way, the best you can. Try not to make anything happen or to push anything away. Do not fight or get into a struggle, overstriving for some experience you want or pushing away something you don't want. We need to have the tools to work skillfully with however our meditation practice unfolds.

Chapter 4

Working with Difficulties

Nothing proceeds in an unbroken line, just getting more and more pleasant and good without any challenges. There are always ups and downs in meditation. To practice meditation and progress, you have to acknowledge and use everything it has to offer, including the times when you cannot concentrate. You do not want to miss the opportunities for insight and growth those times provide.

Your body may ache, or painful thoughts, emotions, or memories can arise, making it difficult to sit through the experience. There will be times when you cannot concentrate and it feels like you are just sitting there waiting for the session to be over. It can be hard not to get up from meditation when you feel restless or bored, something else pulls for your attention, or you simply do not feel like doing it.

To deepen our mindfulness, concentration, and insight we need to be honest with ourselves about what is happening, employing all the skills we are learning for working with what is here, what is real, and what is true. We need an array of tools for navigating our inner landscape, the range of shifting thoughts, feelings, moods, and emotions that appear in the course of meditation—both for when our minds are clear and settled and the meditation feels pleasant and good, and when it feels like it is all falling apart.

Turning into the Skid

Formal meditation is practice for real life. All the work we put in on the meditation cushion is training ourselves to meet the moments of our life without being oppressed by them. When confronted with anything unpleasant, our habitual response is often to push it away. When our knee aches, we stretch out our leg. When old memories or feelings awaken, we distract ourselves. If we cannot concentrate, we push harder. When the present moment is not giving us what we

want, we can fall into a negative reinforcing spiral of frustration, agitation, and struggle.

When negative emotions or distressing thoughts arise, we feel the affliction, even if we are mindfully present. Aches and pains are not going to melt into pleasant sensations, regardless of how we relate to them.

But we can magnify the problem by our inability to be with what is happening. A pain in our neck that will not go away is unpleasant enough. When we engage it in battle, a whole new layer of suffering is added on top of an already painful situation. We feel the pain and then add more suffering through the struggle.

When driving on icy roads, the automatic response if you begin to skid is usually to jerk the steering wheel away from the direction in which you are skidding. But to gain traction and head back in the right direction, you have to steer toward it. The way out is counter-intuitive. Even if you are careening toward a building or tree, the way out is in; you have to turn into the skid. Only once you have gained traction and the tires are gripping the road can you steer away from the obstacle.

This is the challenge. We need practice so that we have the presence of mind, the space between what happens and our response to it, to choose the right course of action. Seeing the inevitable difficulties as a chance for discovery allows for the possibility of freedom. These are opportunities for taking charge of your response in any situation. The way out of suffering is not always to turn away from it, but to bring a willingness to meet your experience.

Noticing the Changing Nature

When our hearts and minds are at peace it is easy to become complacent, but clarity and ease inevitably give way to periods of difficulty

and stress. Just as the sun at its zenith always sets, only to rise again, and flowers open and close according to their natural cycles, the old falls away but a fresh opportunity is left behind.

Insight begins to mature as we learn to end the struggle and turn to meet every experience as our teacher. We do not want to miss the opportunity for growth these times offer.

When hindrances arise or we do not get our way, we can learn to stop fighting ourselves. When our beautiful meditations have turned to burdens, we should not miss the potential that these times of change present to see the transitory nature of life. We begin to understand that nothing has gone wrong, that the situation has merely changed due to its own causes and conditions. This is how everything works.

Some amount of discomfort or pain is inevitable. If you sit still long enough, even if it is in a soft, comfortable chair, your body will hurt. You can lie down to meditate, or choose any posture, and eventually aches and pains will show up. We want to find the balance between shifting our posture to take care of ourselves, and letting things be and learning how to work with what is.

Knowing Your Limits

Notice your experience as you sit down to meditate. Take a few moments to settle into your sitting posture and look to see what the present moment is giving you. This is reality. What do you find is happening? It is not so much a matter of trying to be mindful of your breathing, but being interested and curious to connect with and attune yourself to whatever is actually here. Not what happened the last time you sat to meditate. The whole practice is learning how to work and be skillfully with the present, with *this* reality.

Imagine a circle, with you at the center. Inside the circle are all of the experiences you are able to be present with, whether they are pleasant or painful. Outside the circle are those situations that are too much for you to deal with, things that are so intense or difficult that you simply cannot work with them. Think of meditation practice as expanding the circle to encompass more and more of your life.

We need discernment to know what we can handle, and respect for what really is too much for us. We need to recognize where anything that happens lives in relation to our circle. The wisdom to know when to stay present with something and when, in fact, it is too much comes from experience. We will all have times when we think we are on one side of the circle and we are actually on the other. Oftentimes we struggle, moving away from pain when we really could have worked with it. When we stretch out our knee to relieve the pain or distract ourselves from some emotion, we may miss an opportunity for learning how to be present with and let go of our suffering in the face of difficulties.

There are also times when you might stay with something too long and it would have served you better to shift or move, to change the situation or bring down its intensity if you can. We think we are supposed to stay with it, believing we should be able to remain mindful and present without struggle, when in reality it is simply too much. It falls outside of our circle. We may sit with terrible knee pain, toughing it out, when we need a break—not out of aversion but out of compassion for ourselves, so that we can find some ease and our mind can relax. In those times we suffer unnecessarily.

When to stay with something and when to seek some relief is a question we all must answer for ourselves. Use your best intuition. Do not worry whether or not you made the right decision.

You do not always have the luxury of changing your circumstances, whether in meditation or in life. Whenever something really is too much, we are going to suffer if we cannot bring down the

intensity or find a way out. We need a tremendous amount of compassion for ourselves in those times, when we find there is no escape from something that is beyond our learning edge. Our task then may be to bear our suffering.

You can try redirecting your attention away from the hurt toward something pleasant, safe, or comforting. While pain or sorrow may not disappear because you distract yourself, putting your mind on something pleasing can be a real support, providing a needed break and bolstering your ability to come back later with full attention to deal with the situation. We don't want to always run away from problems, but we do want to use whatever tools will help us.

Try opening your eyes and looking around for a beautiful image, perhaps a flower or painting. Feel the beauty of it. Let the pleasant feeling permeate you. Or pick up a book and read a few inspiring passages, or turn on your favorite music, finding whatever gladdens your mind and helps you feel more happy and relaxed. Notice how good it feels and consciously let the good feeling pervade your body.

Once you feel steadier and more able to meet your experience, try again, turning your attention back to work with the difficulty. Notice what is it like to meet the physical pain or emotional anguish now, and if this helps you meet the situation with some degree of nonreactive presence.

When you feel steady and clear and hindrances are not arising, stay with the breath. You may notice that your mind is quiet, your body is relaxed, and you find an ease of continuity in your attention. If you become aware that your body aches or your mind is distressed, if you are struggling, see if you can stop fighting yourself and try to let go of your suffering. Remember that we are not trying to stay with the breath and be concentrated no matter what, but we do want to stay present for and work skillfully with anything that might happen. Do not try to force yourself back to the breath when difficulties arise, but stay receptive to welcoming all experiences as part of your meditation.

Pleasant and Unpleasant

Some experiences are pleasant, some are unpleasant, and some are in between. Anything unpleasant can be hard to be with. If something is too pleasant it pulls us in, and if it is somewhere in between, neither obviously pleasant nor unpleasant, it is easy to space out or feel restless or bored. The Pali word *vedana*, commonly translated as "feeling" or "feeling tone," refers to this pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral aspect accompanying all of our experience.

Feelings act as filters to color our perceptions and influence how we relate to whatever is happening. When we are not aware of them, we tend to reactively push away anything unpleasant or to grab onto whatever is pleasant. We notice not just the experience itself, but the experience mixed with our opinions and judgments about it. If you are being mindful of knee pain in your meditation, for example, sometimes you might not notice that you are relating to the pain with some aversion. Once you have fallen into reactivity, it's much harder to let go. You want to be aware of whatever is happening, but also of the attitudes you bring to meet your experience.

Noticing the feeling tone creates a wedge of mindfulness, giving you space between what happens and your response to it. By remaining clearly aware of what is happening and the feeling tone associated with it, you can let pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences all come and go without pushing away or trying to hold on to anything.

If you notice that you are tense or struggling, try checking for feeling tone. Just bringing awareness to feelings is often enough help for you to stay present with a challenging experience. You can be aware of something pleasant without holding on to it. You can know your experience is unpleasant without straining to make it go away. You can let go of indifference to meet neutral experiences with interest.

Even when your meditation seems to be going smoothly, it can be useful to check in with the feeling tone from time to time. You

can notice the feeling tone of any sight, sound, smell, taste, physical sensation, or thought. Bringing such awareness to feelings can help unmask subtle areas of craving and clinging that you may not have noticed before.

Opening to All Experiences

So far we have been emphasizing letting our breathing or some other meditation object stay in the foreground and allowing all other experiences to stay in the background of our awareness. We are deepening our connection with the breath, learning to become close, familiar, and intimate with it, inclining our mind to it over other experiences. While we are cultivating a strong preference for the breath as a primary meditation subject, we will not be able to maintain that level of connection and attention all the time.

It soon becomes clear that during some days, some sittings, or some parts of sittings you will not be able to focus or stay present very well. You cannot force your mind to concentrate. You can try to force it, like prying something open that does not want to release, but that will only serve to make you more frustrated and stressed.

There are always many other experiences in addition to the main ones we are working with in meditation. At times you will find yourself agitated or restless, sleepy or dull. Your body may ache or you may be flooded with emotional pain, fear, confusion, old memories, anger, or grief. Or something else will push itself into the forefront of your consciousness, refusing to rest in the background—something with which you struggle or suffer in some way. You may be bothered by sounds or other things that previously were easy to let go and allow to remain in the background.

It can be difficult to stay present when you find yourself facing physical pain or emotional distress. At times it can be challenging

not to fall into aversion when something becomes strong or compelling and you grapple and strain against what is happening.

During these times we want to find ways to open to, include, and incorporate any of these other experiences into the meditation practice. We do not want to fall into a struggle with ourselves, trying to push away whatever is happening, thinking we are supposed to stay only with our breathing.

We began learning how to be mindful by paying attention to our breathing. Then we used the breath to deepen mindfulness. The breath was our first teacher and as we continue to attend to it, mindfulness, concentration, and clear awareness all deepen, along with our ability to be present regardless of what happens. As the art and skill of meditation matures, we learn to surf the waves of all that happens, gracefully moving in a very inclusive way with the continuously changing flow of experience.

Mindfulness with Breathing

When we cannot concentrate, our back aches, or there is pain in our knee or grief in our heart, it can be hard to stay with the breath. Rather than struggling to concentrate, we can let go of the breath and stop trying to keep these difficulties at bay.

One technique to help is switching from mindfulness *of* breathing, or mindfulness of sound, to mindfulness *with* breathing, or with sound, or with any other practice you are doing. Allow the breath to come into your awareness along with whatever else you are dealing with. The breath acts as a stabilizing factor and support, helping you remain present to meet and work with the pain.

For some people it is a sense of breathing into the experience. For others, it is more a sense of having breathing in their awareness alongside whatever else is happening. It is not splitting your attention but having both together at the same time, the pain and the

breathing, the emotion and the breathing. You will have to experiment and see what works best.

When meditation is easy and pleasant, breathe with it, working skillfully and wisely with the pleasure to deepen concentration. Breathe with the good feelings in your body and mind. When it is difficult, try breathing with that. The practice is not to deny or negate your pain; we are not trying to get rid of anything. If you have pain in your body, you can direct your breathing right into the pain. If you have pain in your heart, try breathing with the anger or sadness.

If you are having trouble connecting with your breathing, look to see where the block in the connection is; turn your attention to it and see if you can breathe with that. If you are unable to be with whatever that is, turn to what is stopping you *now* and see if you can breathe with *that*. Keep backing up; keep turning your attention toward whatever is keeping you from being with your present-moment experience until you find what you can be with. That is the place to focus.

Your experience will tell you what is needed and how to proceed. Notice if you are struggling, if there is some way in which you are not relaxed and at ease. Your struggle will tell you. Look to see what is going on and if you can relax into your experience. Do not fight or strain to keep the breath at the center of attention. Let go of the breath and turn with mindfulness to meet the reality of the moment.

You may need to experiment to find how you can breathe with discomfort, or how you can let the support of the sound you are working with, acting as a stabilizing influence, come in with you to meet the worry. It may not be obvious how you can breathe with strong emotion or with any other experience. Explore and experiment to find how the breath can help you be present with your distress, and incorporate it as part of the meditation. When you are not concentrated, you can breathe with that. When your back aches, you can breathe with that. You can breathe with the pain in your knee, or with your anger or grief. Let the breath help you integrate your struggles as part of the practice.

By turning toward your experience you can work with physical and emotional pain, including them in the meditation. When you are in pain or upset, if your experience is difficult or unpleasant in some way, breathe with it. Try directing the breath; see what emerges as you breathe into grief. The breath will help you remain steady and present even in the face of discomfort. It will act as a support to help you stay more relaxed.

Eventually, either in this or in a future session, things will get quieter and you will be able to concentrate again, the difficulties will subside or they will change or will not be so interesting or compelling. You will again be able to let other experiences stay in the background without struggle and you can return to the mindfulness of breathing practice.

In this way, you do not have to choose what to be aware of in your meditation. You can allow your experience to inform you. During the times when you can concentrate well, when your body is at ease and other experiences are not so strong, keep them all in the background and stay with your main, simple practice: mindfulness of breathing. At other times these experiences will become strong or you will find yourself struggling or suffering, and then you can bring in mindfulness with breathing, or with sound, letting the breathing or sound act as a support to help you stay more undistracted and present. In this way you learn to move seamlessly back and forth between mindfulness of breathing and mindfulness with breathing.

There may also be times when whatever is happening is so strong or so compelling that you just feel that you need to put your wholehearted, full attention on the experience while letting go of the breathing completely. Even mindfulness with breathing may not be appropriate; instead, you remain fully with the other experience. During those times, too, stay with the experience until it subsides or you need a break, and whenever you choose you can come back to the home base practice of mindful breathing.

If physical or emotional pain or struggle has not settled out when it is time to end your meditation, you may wish to take the last few minutes before getting up to shift your awareness to something that helps ease the stress. If you have been sitting with body pain, change your posture. Take a few deeper breaths and stretch out your arms and legs. Open your eyes and notice your surroundings. Or you can simply get up from the session if you feel ready to transition and carry on with your day.

Over time you will learn that the course of meditation, like all of life, flows in cycles, following its own patterns and progression. You will be more able to relax with the ever-changing rhythms as they lose their power to shake you off center.

Chapter 5

Right Concentration

If you have ever undertaken the practice of bringing mindfulness into daily life, trying to be aware the best you can moment to moment and not be lost on automatic pilot, you know how hard it can be to stay present and awake. Perhaps you try to stay with your breathing or feel the movement in your feet as you move about, being mindful and clearly aware in any way you can, as much as you can. Or you use something else—feeling the phone in your hand as you talk, your hands on the steering wheel if you are driving, anything to help anchor your attention in the present moment. It is the same in meditation. Perhaps you are present for a few breaths, only to find yourself waking up sometime later from the daydream of your thoughts and worries and all the imaginings that capture your attention to remember, *Oh yeah, I forgot, I'm trying to be mindful.*

If that has ever happened to you, then you have experienced mindfulness without the support of concentration. That is a very different experience from mindfulness *with* concentration. As our practice develops, the fruits of our efforts in formal meditation permeate all the rest of our lives. We find that we are increasingly mindful naturally, without having to try to make it happen.

The Pali word we have been translating as "concentration" is *samadhi*. It is significant that the final element, the culmination, of the Eightfold Path is Right Concentration, and that the whole final section—Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration—is called the samadhi group. It is not the mindfulness group; it is the concentration group.

This is telling us something. It is saying that Right Concentration includes effort, that mindfulness is included, it is not something separate, and that it includes undistractedness. All three of these elements need to work together, informing and supporting each other, in order for concentration to be Right Concentration.

It is hard to overstate the important place samadhi holds in the Buddhist path to awakening. We have to understand Right Concentration and how to apply it, especially as we begin to cultivate and

attain the subtler, deeper stages in meditation. The Buddha placed great importance and emphasis on samadhi, talking about it over and over in his teachings. In addition to the prominent place samadhi holds in the Noble Eightfold Path, it is emphasized in many of the Buddhist teachings that elaborate on meditation practices.

Two Kinds of Concentration

The word "concentration" carries various connotations, each shaping how it is considered in relation to insight meditation. None of the interpretations are right or wrong, no application is better or more correct than another. I hope we can appreciate the range of ways concentration is practiced and the various ways it is related to insight so we can make conscious, informed choices in how to steer our practice, because each choice will influence the direction in which meditation unfolds in different ways.

Samadhi means "undistracted"; another good translation is "collected." An undistracted or collected mind can unfold either naturally, on its own, or by purposefully aiming in one direction or the other. Strengthening concentration can serve to connect us more intimately with our body and mind or to disconnect us from our experience.

If you continue practicing as I have been teaching here, giving emphasis to mindfulness of breathing, your ability to concentrate and remain steady and focused with the breath will grow. Your mind will progressively wander less and less and you can eventually become so skilled at centering on one thing that your mind will hardly waver at all. If you keep training your mind, taking your practice far enough, you can reach a stage in which you become extremely adept at concentrating. Your ability to remain steady and undistracted on one object will have been strengthened to the point where you will not notice any other experiences.

You will be fully engrossed, fully absorbed, just in the experience of one thing, the one meditation object, whatever it is. At this stage your mind is so fixed on a narrow point that it can never wander. At this point undistractedness has progressed to the pinnacle of steadiness.

The changing flow of experience will stop for you because your mind has become one-pointed. Ultimately, concentration can be taken so far that you will no longer notice experiences in your body, thoughts, sounds, moods, or emotions. You will lose awareness of other experiences because the ability of your mind to concentrate on this one point has been strengthened so much that your mind does not go to anything else; you do not perceive anything from any of the senses.

I call this type of undistractedness *exclusive* concentration, because the mind is exclusively focused on one thing; awareness rests exclusively on that one thing and excludes awareness of everything else. It is also called *one-pointedness* or *fixed concentration* because the mind can stay narrowly fixed on the one point of the breath.

The second way undistractedness can develop is equal in depth and power to one-pointed exclusive concentration, but is qualitatively very different. In this second style of undistractedness, perception of changing phenomena is never lost. Instead of being lost, your awareness of changing experiences is enhanced. At its culmination the mind itself stops, just as it does in exclusive one-pointedness, but this is stopping of a different sort.

Rather than the flow of sense perceptions stopping, the mind comes to tranquility, all the while being open, receptive, and clearly aware of the full range of changing experiences. The mind, equally still, unwavering, and steady as in one-pointedness, stops but does not stop fixed on a point.

This is a different kind of stillness, known as jhana, an utterly undistracted awareness that is open to include all that is happening.

In a later chapter we will explore the nature of jhana, and how to enter and work with those meditative states.

In order to differentiate from one-pointedness, I call this second kind of concentration *unification of mind*. This concentration is *inclusive* rather than exclusive, because it excludes nothing and is inclusive of all experiences.

The main distinction between inclusive unification of mind and exclusive one-pointed concentration is whether or not you have any experiences of changing phenomena. Exclusive concentration is disconnecting. When taken to its culmination there is no longer any sensory experience. It is a purely mental state in which the mind becomes one-pointed, such that there is only the experience of bliss, or of light, for example. All sense of changing experience is lost. You cannot experience your body.

In inclusive concentration you have not lost connection with the body; in fact, that connection is enhanced. You are aware of your body and of your mental experiences, but along with that there is a deeper place of the mind that is utterly still, clear, present, and aware. Everything is happening and unfolding within pure awareness, and the pure awareness is not moving. The mind is unmoving, mindfulness and clarity are amplified, and the connection with the whole range of your experience is heightened. It is this second style of concentration, this inclusive style, toward which we are aiming.

This distinction between two kinds of undistractedness is important as you learn to navigate the deeper, subtler stages of concentration. You may naturally incline toward unmoving focus that is concentrated exclusively on a point, losing awareness of everything else, or you may lean toward an unmoving and undistracted mind that is open and aware as all kinds of different experiences come and go. By understanding these distinctions, and with a clear sense of where you are aiming, you may choose to let the process unfold on its own, or you can steer the unfolding in either direction. In the next chapter we will discuss how to recognize in which direction you

are naturally moving and how you can steer toward inclusive undistractedness, which will be a powerful support in bringing concentration and insight together.

Concentration Supports Insight

No Buddhist teachers say, "Be distracted." Everyone appreciates the importance and benefit of a clear, steady, unconfused mind for the cultivation of insight. Aiming toward more presence and stability helps you to not be lost and caught up in your thoughts, feelings, and moods. But while the ability of the mind to remain undistracted is considered important by all, there is a wide range of understandings and teachings about what that concentration should look like. Some meditation teachers de-emphasize concentration in insight meditation while others place great emphasis on its development. This can be a source of confusion, especially when reading guides like this one. If you are an experienced meditator and have heard instructions from numerous teachers, it may not be clear how, or if, these instructions fit together, or if you should be doing insight meditation or concentration practices.

In fact, you are not doing insight versus doing concentration. It is all one practice. There does not need to be any contention between mindfulness and concentration; we need not choose between the two. We can strengthen both together and aim our meditation in a way that appreciates and highlights both.

For insight and concentration to work together you have to develop the right kind of concentration. Insight necessitates an intimate connection with your entire experience so you can see what is happening and how you are relating to it. If you become too exclusively concentrated, if you lose contact with changing mental and physical experience, you lose the link with yourself and insights are not likely to arise. You will have to lift out of the concentration in

order to regain awareness of the changing experiences of your body and mind and turn toward insight.

You need to stay connected with your body, heart, and mind if you want to understand their nature. Insight blossoms as you come to recognize that all things are constantly changing due to their own causes and conditions. When you try to hold on to anything that is destined to change, you sow the seeds of suffering. In order to know these truths directly, beyond ordinary intellectual understanding, you need to touch changing phenomena so that you can observe change and your responses to it. It is in service of this goal that we are cultivating unification of mind, which can go all the way to jhana without losing the experience of change. Insight can arise even in the deepest stages of samadhi; it is, in fact, enhanced since you never lose connection with change.

Since we will be developing concentration that is connecting, you are not going to lose awareness of your body and mind. Just the opposite; your connection with yourself will be enhanced. You do not have to come out of even the deepest stages of concentration into some lower level in order to do insight meditation.

You can synthesize concentration and insight into one practice through cultivation of inclusive, connecting awareness, opening whole new realms of opportunity for deepening insight. Stilling the mind to the point where you are undistracted but still connected with all experiences, you are never too concentrated. You do this by bringing up mindfulness to meet the concentration. When you have a small degree of concentration, bring the mindfulness to meet it. When concentration and its associated experiences are powerful, bring the mindfulness up to meet that. Insight is happening even in the deepest stages of concentration because you never lose connection. You can take the practice all the way to jhana and mindfulness, concentration, and insight will all come with you and be unified.

Concentration that is connecting shines a bright light of awareness with which to meet our experience in ever-subtler ways, opening

the way for profound insights to arise. When concentration is connected, the ground is prepared for insights to occur both within states of concentration and without.

A Potential Pitfall of Concentration

The undistractedness that comes with being well-concentrated can generate a whole range of amazing and compelling phenomena. In a later chapter I will discuss the kinds of attractive experiences that can arise when you are concentrated—deeply satisfying feelings of peace and calm, pleasant feelings of energy moving in your body, and interesting lights and sounds. It is common for meditators to practice in order to have these experiences. The experiences of being concentrated have an important function in making the mind malleable and wieldy, and gladdening the mind, leading to relaxation and ease and allowing us to remain present with the ever-changing flow of experience.

But these pleasant experiences can be pitfalls. If meditators confuse these experiences with the greater purpose of being concentrated—to enhance awareness of and connection with our self—meditators risk becoming attached to them. We should not fear these states or try to avoid them, but should bring wisdom and discernment to working with them, just as we do with any other experience. Fear of attachment should not dissuade us from cultivating these important states of mind. If clinging to or grasping for meditative states arises, that can be a rich area for investigation and learning. Just as we should not seek after suffering, but should not fear it either, we should neither chase after the pleasures of concentration nor avoid them due to worry about attachment. I will discuss how to recognize and manage these situations. Having clear guidance, you will not have to worry about any of the experiences that might arise in your meditation.

Right Concentration

Right Concentration is always defined as the four jhanas (as we'll see, jhana is divided into four stages). If you remember that concentration really means being undistracted, then jhana is a special kind of undistracted awareness that does not leave mindfulness and insight behind. Right Concentration yokes tranquility, mindfulness, and insight evenly together.

Though the Pali texts are explicit that Right Concentration is the four jhanas, this does not mean you have wrong concentration unless you have attained jhana. Aim toward jhana but be careful not to set yourself up for overstriving. From a practice perspective it is more useful to consider Right Concentration as *culminating* in jhana. Whatever degree of concentration you have can be considered Right Concentration, as long as it is accompanied by Right Understanding, Right Intention, and the other elements of the Eightfold Path. Holding concentration with this attitude can support you in staying easeful and relaxed, helping you avoid overstriving or struggle even as you remain conscientious and committed in your meditation.

Chapter 6

Deepening Concentration

With growing concentration and heightened mindfulness, meditation opens in whole new directions as our efforts bear deepening fruit. Supported by the steady presence you have been cultivating, what had been difficult or a struggle now comes almost effortlessly. Where you may have been plagued by hindrances or strove just to stay present for a few breaths, you are now opening to a degree of ease and clarity inaccessible in the beginning.

This can be an inspiring time, encouraging and sustaining your continued practice. As peace, calm presence, openhearted kindness, and all the benefits you have been receiving on the meditation cushion are carried through into the rest of your life, you may feel a growing sense of gratitude and a deeper motivation to explore where this journey of self-discovery might lead.

This is also a time to notice if you fall into craving or clinging. Just as we can easily get caught up in ordinary life, we can become enthralled with the progression of meditation. We do not want to turn what is wholesome and meant to help us come to an end of suffering into a source of clinging. If you find yourself pushing to make the concentration better or stronger or more blissful, try to relax and let go into whatever is happening, whether it is a time of discomfort or ease. Stay with the simple mindfulness of breathing practice, however the process continues to reveal itself. Let the power of the concentration you have developed support an even deeper, more sustained connection with your breath.

By now you are well acquainted with meditation's challenges and rewards. Bring the skills in mindfulness you have been developing to meet and work with all the inevitable ups and downs. Notice what is happening and how you are relating to the unfolding process. The same equanimity you employed to prevent you from falling into aversion with hindrances will help you avoid the trap of craving for the pleasure of concentration.

Ways of Unfolding

Deepening practice can develop in a variety of ways. As your ability to remain undistracted grows, the experiences associated with concentration can become much stronger and more compelling, and will tend to fill more and more of your consciousness. Concentration and the physical sensations of breathing may begin to mix, merge, or interact in a variety of ways.

Sometimes the physical breath will expand out naturally and be experienced through the entire abdomen, torso, shoulders, or head. Or awareness can shift from the gross physical sensations of the breath to subtler inner sensations, which can be experienced as patterns of energy in the body.

We discussed previously how sometimes the sensations of breathing can be more prominent than the experiences of concentration, and other times the concentration can become stronger in your awareness than the breath. This dynamic can also shift so you feel the concentration and the breath merging until they become one blended experience. No longer feeling the physical sensations of breathing as being separate from the experiences of concentration, you now find that the object of your attention is transformed into a new experience, breath and concentration unified into what we can call the *samadhi-breath*. You might experience the samadhi-breath as the breath blended with light, energy, pleasure, stillness, sound, or any of the experiences we have been talking about. Or, rather than merging just with the breath, samadhi also can expand beyond the breath to fill your whole body.

If subtle breath energy, or any other samadhi experience, suffuses throughout your body, let the process happen. Perhaps you will still be able to individually discern the breath and the concentration, or the concentration suffused throughout the body, but the sense of

them merged into one will be stronger. If any of these phenomena happen, let the feeling of breath expanded through the body or the blended experience become the new object of your meditation practice. Stay with the new blended or expanded experience, just as you have been working with the breath from the beginning.

The merging of samadhi and breath, or the expanding of breath to fill the whole body, may happen naturally; or you may choose to direct your attention to move in these directions, if you feel yourself becoming less connected with the sense of your body. In our discussion of Right Concentration we said there are two main directions in which concentration can head: toward inclusive concentration or exclusive concentration. For some of us, the experience of concentration will naturally expand to suffuse the body. If samadhi has pervaded your entire body, you are naturally heading in the direction of inclusive, embodied unification of mind, and you do not have to do anything except let the process unfold on its own. Do not try to get back to the breath. Continue mindfully connecting with the whole body. The breath will have done its job.

Meditation can also progress in the opposite direction. Rather than feeling embodied, you can become increasingly engrossed in the concentration experiences themselves. If these experiences become quite strong and compelling, you may feel drawn into them. You may want to leave any feeling of your body behind and go into these experiences—we call it becoming absorbed in them—ever more deeply. Becoming less connected with and aware of the body, you are becoming more engaged with and absorbed in the purely mental experience of the pleasure, the light or the bliss.

You are headed toward a one-pointed, disembodied, exclusive concentration. If you were to follow that and let the bliss fill more and more of your awareness, you would eventually lose awareness of your body altogether and only the experience of light or bliss would remain.

Steering Toward Inclusive Concentration

Since we are aiming for inclusive, embodied samadhi, as the concentration becomes stronger, notice in which direction you are inclining. Check in once or twice during a sitting period to see if you have a sense of being connected with your body or not. For many people there is neither a strong, obvious pull into the concentration and away from the body, nor a strong sense of concentration being embodied. In this case simply stay with the mindful breathing or with the blended samadhi-breath, however you experience it. You are entering a subtle realm, where the distinction between embodied and disembodied concentration may not be easily discernible.

There may not be much experience in your body to connect with because everything may be so quiet and still, but you will still have some sense of knowing there is a body, or that you are losing that awareness. The normal sense of solidity can dissolve as you begin to perceive your body as being composed of energy, vibration, or light. Everything can become so tranquil and still that, while you are still connected with and have a sense of the body, there is not much happening to experience.

You may need to purposefully turn away from exclusive concentration and steer yourself in the direction of inclusive samadhi. If the sensations of breath take on a body of their own or begin to feel disconnected, you are heading into a purely mental experience. That is the time to incline your mind or coax it back and suffuse your awareness throughout the body. If meditation is unfolding this way for you, once the experiences of concentration become quite compelling, rather than having all your attention absorbed or pulled into them, do precisely the opposite—pull them into and suffuse them throughout your body.

You can do that by turning your attention back to your body. Put your awareness on your body, connecting with it wherever and in whatever way you experience it. Because the power of your concentrated mind is so strong, simply by placing your awareness on your body, consciously turning your attention to it, the concentration will turn in to the body with you and will pervade throughout your body on its own.

You do not want to do this too early in the process. You will know when the time is right by paying attention to what happens. You will know if it is too early; if you were not that concentrated, in turning your attention away from the samadhi or the samadhi-breath and toward awareness of your body, you will tend to lift out of the concentration. You will clearly see that your mind is less settled.

And you will know if you waited too long because you will have become fully absorbed into the mental samadhi experience and all awareness of your body will have vanished. Do not worry if this happens. You will have gained experience for the next time to better know when to turn back to your body before the connection is severed. You will know if you turned your attention back at the right time because the experiences of bliss, energy, light, or peace will go into your body and fill it, and it will continue opening in that direction on its own as you settle further in concentration.

Deepening of Letting Go

Bring however much effort is needed to your meditation but no more; use the lightest touch of attention necessary for staying present and connected. Balance making effort with letting go, so that the building momentum takes over and does more of the work for you. Let the concentration itself carry you further into the practice. You may

have a feeling of wanting to try harder and push with the mind. This is not a physical sense of pushing; it is increasing your effort beyond simply connecting with and sustaining your attention on the meditation object—going beyond that to a mental feeling of working harder to press your attention and immerse awareness even more fully into the meditation object. If you try pressing with your awareness, pay attention to whether it causes agitation or helps you deepen.

At some point you will have to let go of pushing. It is too much mental doing and ultimately hinders the subtler stages of letting go required to drop into jhana. We sometimes have a tendency to keep increasing effort as concentration strengthens, but this can be counterproductive. The deeper stages of samadhi are stages of letting go, not stages of more doing. Let the momentum take over and carry you. This is the doorway into jhana.

Chapter 7

Strong Energies and Challenging Experiences

If you meditate you are going to get more concentrated, and with concentration come both opportunities and challenges. Deepening concentration brings new possibilities for growth, but we need to acknowledge and be respectful of the very real and powerful energies, emotions, memories, and somatic experiences that can accompany the growing steadiness and clarity.

We cannot fully know all that might arise in our practice, so we need to have the skills and tools to work with anything that happens. We need to learn to navigate the terrain, familiarizing ourselves with the landscape of consciousness with appreciation for both its potential and pitfalls, and we need to bring an open, receptive attitude and a willingness to stay present with what is happening for us. With guidance and experience we develop resources and skills to meet anything we encounter—listening carefully, paying attention, and acknowledging our limitations and knowing when and how to back off.

The progression of deepening samadhi is highly individual. For some people meditation unfolds in a way that is very smooth and calm from beginning practice through the subtlest stages of jhana, without a lot of strong energetic experiences. For others the progression of meditation can be quite powerful and dramatic.

Working with the Pleasure

The pleasure of concentration helps loosen our mundane attachments and the pull of ordinary sense pleasures. As the pleasure of concentration strengthens, sensual desires begin to lose their grip on us. Because the contentment of a quiet mind is more satisfying than ordinary worldly enjoyments, the power and allure of worldly pleasures start to diminish, without us having to do much to make it happen.

But because the pleasure of concentration is so compelling, we may begin meditating just in order to have more. This is why some

teachers invalidate these experiences or would have us avoid them, concerned that they will serve only to increase craving. But just as we should not make too much of them, neither should we deny the pleasure and profundity such experiences offer.

We should not be afraid of the pleasure of concentration; the pleasure serves an important function in furthering the deepening process. The Buddha called jhana the pleasure associated with renunciation, seclusion, peace, and enlightenment. He said we should seek out and develop this kind of pleasure, that it should not be avoided or feared.

Deepening concentration offers us challenges and opportunities. When we touch it we are happy; it feels right and good. The art and skill of meditation rests in understanding how to employ this pleasure as an aid for immersing ourselves more fully, more deeply into the meditation without turning what is a wholesome, skillful, and powerful aid on the path to enlightenment into a source of craving. Chasing after or clinging to some experience is a sure way to increase your suffering and to cut yourself off from the very meditative states you seek to develop.

This is the time to recollect and connect with your intentions, enlisting all the supports you have been developing. If we do not know what our intentions are, our actions are liable to be dictated by our feelings and moods, especially when the power and energy of a situation is strong. Let your wholesome intention act as a touchstone. Make it the standard by which you make decisions, instead of following after the moment's appeal.

The natural tendency to be drawn toward pleasant experiences is deeply ingrained in all of us. But even during the most intense times, when the pleasures enthrall us, we can avoid becoming seduced by them. Gather all the mindfulness and clarity of awareness you are able to access, and rest in the protection of your wholesome intention.

When we are clear about our intention, fascinating experiences do not delude or deceive us. We remember that our intention is the liberation pointed to by the Buddha, not to collect one more exciting experience that is only going to come and go like all the others before it.

You never have to worry about being too concentrated as long as that concentration is Right Concentration. Remember that samadhi, the term we translate as "concentration," actually means "undistracted." You can never be too undistracted as long as you have an inclusive awareness along with mindfulness and equanimity to the extent necessary for meeting whatever degree of concentration there is.

Balancing Energy

While you cannot be too concentrated, you can have the wrong kind of concentration or an unbalanced concentration. Energy, or any of the experiences we are talking about that are associated with concentration, can be too strong for us or of a quality that we are not able to handle.

After discussing some of the ways unbalanced concentration can manifest, we will examine various approaches for working with them. Anything that can arise in meditation can be worked with. With proper tools you will learn to navigate all of meditation's ups and downs, meeting whatever happens with confidence and clarity.

Strong energies can course through the body, and can be associated with pleasure, bliss, or light, or they can be highly unpleasant or agitating. Some meditators may experience loud inner sounds. These experiences can be agreeable and satisfying, or they may become unpleasant or too much for us to handle. These energies can remain localized in one place, or they can move around or permeate the

entire body. They can remain at the same intensity, weaken, or grow, and their location and strength can fluctuate in regular cycles or appear sporadically. All of this is dependent upon our individual dispositions, the sensitivities of our nervous systems, and our psychosomatic conditioned patterns.

Concentration tends to suppress the hindrances, gladdening our hearts and calming our minds. Unpleasant or challenging thoughts and feelings tend not to come up when our minds are settled. But being concentrated can also have the opposite effect. Concentration tends to permeate and pervade whatever experience is most prominent, so difficult states of mind may become magnified rather than suppressed.

As your experiences of concentration become stronger and your mind becomes increasingly focused, the concentration tends to enhance those experiences. A memory or story can become blown up and because your perception has been altered you may not be able to tell. The exaggerated version becomes your reality and you believe it.

A student once told me of a time on a meditation retreat when she went looking for something to eat in the community refrigerator, a place where extra food—fruit, bread, cheese, and nut butters—was made available for anyone who got hungry between meals. Just as she opened the refrigerator she noticed a disapproving look from one of the retreat center staff who happened to walk past.

She had gotten into a very quiet, concentrated place and from that one glance tumbled into a story that she had done something terrible, had somehow broken the rules by being in that refrigerator, that she was being judged for eating between meals when she should be meditating and, finally, that she was going to be kicked out of the retreat. Nothing came of it and at the end of the retreat she asked the person about it. That staff person had no recollection of the incident. An incidental glance, of no consequence but perceived

in a certain way, got interpreted and ascribed with a world of meaning.

We tend not to notice when our minds go into this kind of proliferation. We can just believe the stories we are making up, imagining the worst possible reasons or motives and the most terrible outcomes, spinning out more stories from the stories, without recognizing the process that is going on. We create entire realities and proceed to live in those worlds as if they were real.

You can be resting peacefully in meditation when some old, forgotten memory suddenly pops into your mind. Maybe you recall something you did that caused harm to others or pain for yourself and you are filled with regret, guilt, or shame. And because you are so concentrated, that hurt becomes magnified and fills your consciousness, and you are completely back reliving that old experience, submerged in the old feelings.

Old traumas can be activated in concentrated states, triggering upsetting memories of physical injury or emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse. Or patterns of fear, worry, self-judgment, or any parts of your life you deal with regularly can come roaring up, seemingly stronger than ever. Desire or longing in some part of your life, something you struggle with daily, can feel like it is going to overwhelm you.

Entering Unfamiliar Territory

We may enter new territory of consciousness where familiar reference points start to disappear. For many people this never happens, but for some, deepening concentration can open to altered experiences in which their normal sense of reality begins to break down.

We may perceive our body as being composed of energy, vibration, or light, and the border between our inner and outer world may become less obvious. It can be disconcerting to feel the solidity and

boundary we are used to experiencing begin to melt. You might sense your body grown to many times normal, perhaps feeling as if it fills the entire room. The feeling can be so real that you are convinced you have actually physically expanded, and you have to open your eyes to see that your body is actually normal size.

Through the power of our concentrated mind we may open to perceptions of impermanence where our body and the external world, everything that had seemed solid and stable, now appears to be in constant flux. You may find yourself on a knife-edge between past and future as the present moment dissolves right out from under you. We can become frightened if our perception of impermanence gets ahead of our equanimity.

If we find ourselves in terrain with which we are unfamiliar, we may become disoriented. If anything happens that we are unaccustomed to, we may feel shaky or fearful. Though these occurrences do not happen for everyone, any of the experiences associated with concentration can become strong and we need some skillful means for working with them when they do.

Two Main Approaches

For all of these reasons, we need to be respectful of the potential for anything to happen, and we need to develop our capacity for dealing with whatever might arise.

There are two main approaches for dealing with any strong or unfamiliar conditions we may encounter in meditation. We can bring down the intensity of the situation or we can bring up and strengthen our mindfulness, equanimity, and ability to be present with those experiences. Knowing which approach to take, when to turn toward a situation and when to change our circumstances or move away, is an art—an art that we can develop with experience.

Bringing Up Ability to Be With Strong Experiences

When the situation is within our capability but we just do not like what is happening, we have to find a way to wait for it to subside on its own. We need confidence in our ability to learn how to be with things, developing patience and a capacity to hang in there through the turbulent times.

Cultivating self-reliance may require some trial and error, but over time and with experience we know we can trust ourselves. We know we do not have to believe our stories, fears, perceptions, or moods, because we recognize that these things come and go. We have seen over and over that every experience we have ever had has passed. And we know the same is true for every experience we are ever going to have. Because we have seen that these things come and go, we know how to be with them all and we know we will emerge from them in time.

One meditator, some days into an intensive retreat, reported having a song suddenly pop into his mind. The song kept looping, repeating over and over, and this went on for two days. He pushed against it, struggling to turn it off, but he found that pushing only fed it, giving it energy. After half a day he was crying for mercy and finally he gave up, let go, and just waited. After two days it disappeared on its own.

Sometimes, all we need is simply to identify what is happening, acknowledging if the energy feels strong or edgy, or if it feels like too much. Just by recognizing our experience and how we are relating with what is happening, we are able to summon the resources needed to meet these challenging forces, strengthening mindfulness and resting in the undistracted knowing while the process unfolds.

If mindfulness is well established and stability is firm, it does not matter how powerful the samadhi experience is because we are steady,

we are undistracted, and we can take refuge in the mindfulness itself. Mindfulness and equanimity help create the container to hold samadhi experiences. When there is too little of either, we are liable to be pulled out of a balanced presence; but these experiences do not bother us if we can meet them with equanimity and clear awareness. We do not have to do anything with them. When mindfulness is clear and balance is strong, we can perceive that whatever happens is just another experience that arises and passes away, without grasping at it or pushing it away.

Try bringing in a quality of observing, rather than becoming caught up, lost, or identified with the experience. You can notice that there is awareness or mindfulness and that you can relax back into and rest in the pure knowing of the experience. You are still having the experience but you are aware of being aware. You know that you know. And that can often be a very strong stabilizing force to help work with what is happening.

Resting in the knowing does not mean being a disconnected or detached witness, untouched by what is happening. You are fully in the experience, but in a way that is disentangled and unfettered. Such an untroubled and unburdened abiding can act as the safe container for letting go. You can be more deeply present without agitation and can more fully know, not as a concept but as directly experienced, that this mental, physical, or emotional phenomenon is just another part of the stream of consciousness that arises and passes away due to its own causes and conditions.

Taking refuge in the knowing and in the letting go, we gain access to a clear, quiet strength and fearlessness, enabling us to be present and to let go even more fully. We can be fearless because we know we are protected, no matter what happens. We have established a secure footing for venturing forth.

Sometimes we are able to be present with whatever is happening, but we are afraid of what might happen next. For many people fear is highly unpleasant. Noticing that fear is present and how

unpleasant it is may be just enough support for us to stay with the experience more fully.

I have had very powerful experiences arise while meditating, followed by fear that those experiences were going to keep intensifying. But then I would remember to drop back and rest in awareness as a refuge. From that place all the experiences could arise and pass away and whatever happened was not a problem.

Bringing Down Intensity

Along with broadening skills for how to be present with something, we must learn how and when to interrupt the process. If you have tried working with the meditation and it still feels like too much, you may need a break. We need to be respectful of samadhi's power and of our boundaries and capabilities. Being honest about what is happening includes being honest about our ability to relate to what is happening.

Use your best judgment on how to proceed and try not to disparage yourself as a bad meditator, thinking that you should stay with an experience when in reality dealing with it is beyond your capacity. If your mindful presence or equanimity is not sufficient to meet the concentration, find a way to limit or stop the process. If you are not able to be clear, mindful, steady, and present, you need to acknowledge that fact. You may need to bring down the intensity, smooth the rough edges, or pull out of the meditation entirely.

From the beginning days of your meditation you have been cultivating the ability to direct your awareness by returning over and over to your breathing. Now, use the skills you have developed to redirect your attention away from the intensity and toward something nurturing and sustaining.

Try putting your attention to some place in your body that feels steady. Feel your body sitting in the chair or your bottom or legs

pressing on the cushion or bench wherever you are sitting. Feel your arms and legs. Put your attention anywhere you can in your body to help yourself feel more embodied and grounded. If the energy is strong, let it flow out your hands and feet and drain into the ground. Take some calming breaths, breathing in a sense of peace and calm and breathing out the energy. Or try opening your eyes and looking around to reconnect and get back into the normal world. Perhaps get up and walk around, go outside, or engage in mundane activities, feeling your feet or legs as you move. Try anything like this you can do to be more grounded and get back to your ordinary, everyday reality.

And then, when you are ready, if you are ready, you can come back, either in this session or another—back into the practice. In this way we learn with experience when it is time to bring the energy and intensity down, when it is time to back off and come out of the meditation, and when to stay with it by strengthening the presence of mind and equanimity, the pure mindfulness that enables us to rest more fully with whatever is happening.

We want to be respectful and not push ourselves into anything. Sometimes you touch on something and then you pull back. But then you touch it again and pull back over and over until you gain some familiarity, letting mindfulness be your refuge, so that even if something is completely unfamiliar and you do not know what is happening, you can rest at peace in mindful presence.

Chapter 8

Jhana: The Culmination of Concentration

After embarking on his spiritual quest, leaving home, family, and the comfortable, secure life he had known, Siddhartha Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, spent the next six years engaged in a variety of stringent spiritual practices. You will sometimes see statues and images of a skeletal Buddha, representing the ascetic Gotama, emaciated through years of austerity and self-denial. He almost died before realizing that ascetic practices and self-mortification were dead ends that did not lead to liberation from the human condition.

As he had this realization he remembered a time from his childhood, sitting in the shade of a rose-apple tree watching his father plowing a field, when he spontaneously entered a deep state of samadhi, the first jhana. He was feeling happy, relaxed and at ease in the beauty of that orchard, and naturally fell into this blissful state of peace and calm.

And now, his body wasted and near death, he considered whether that same state of clarity and ease could be the way forward. Realizing that jhana was where the path to enlightenment lay and that it would be hard to attain that state in such an emaciated condition, he began to eat, caring for his body and regaining strength. He then turned his attention in a new direction, to the cultivation of Right Samadhi—tranquility and insight yoked evenly together in jhana.

It is hard to overstate the significance of jhana in the Buddha's path of meditation. Over and over the Buddha emphasized its importance. He practiced jhana on the night of his enlightenment, he taught jhana to his students, and after his enlightenment he would sometimes withdraw his mind in jhana. He had developed the ability, the mastery, to access these absorption states whenever he chose.

A mind well concentrated is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, flexible, steady, and attained to imperturbability. Such a mind has a penetrative power far surpassing ordinary awareness; it can perceive reality on whole new levels and, when turned toward

awakening and liberation, can see the subtle places of suffering and the ways we can truly rest in the stream of nonclinging.

What Is Jhana?

Jhana is dramatically different from the ordinary daily consciousness in which most of us spend our lives. For many, jhana seems exotic and far away from any experience they can relate to or imagine attaining. But as your practice matures, you come to know the extent to which meditative consciousness can evolve. If you have ever sat an intensive meditation retreat, you see how far your practice can develop in just a few days. Jhana is not only for ascetics living in caves. Real meditators just like you have realized the benefits jhana has to offer.

Recall that as meditation progresses, the unfolding of undistractedness can diverge, heading either toward increasing disconnection from or toward enhanced awareness of your body and mind. Jhana is the culmination of samadhi that is connected. Jhana is a state of deep calm, undistracted clarity, and enhanced connection with and profound insight into the nature of the body and the mind.

Because in jhana your mind is so highly attuned and sensitive, you are opening to perceptions on much more refined levels. You may perceive your body as being made of energy vibrations or light. You become effortlessly aware of subtle thoughts or impulses. At this stage your body and mind may be calmed to such a high degree there is not a lot of mental and physical activity to experience, but you do not need much to be aware of since the mind is so sensitive and attuned. Heightened awareness of and connection with the body is both an essential characteristic of jhana and, as we shall see, a way leading to it.

Defining Jhana

Four jhanas are described in the Buddhist texts, comprising progressively subtler stages of increasing calm, clarity, and peace. The four jhanas are not actually four separate discrete states; each is a marker along a continuum. While some of the attributes of the first jhana drop away as you progress through the stages, others are retained, though they may become smoother and subtler from one jhana to the next.

To understand the nature of jhana and how to access and progress through the stages, we will begin by exploring the first jhana. Once we understand the first jhana, what the experience of it is like and how to attain it, we will examine aspects of jhana in general. Then we will come back to the four jhanas in sequence, proceeding from the first jhana through the even subtler stages of concentration: the second, third, and fourth jhanas.

The first jhana is defined by this formula:

> Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, one enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination.

"Secluded from sensual pleasures" means having established supportive conditions for entering the deeper stages of samadhi. We can meditate in any surroundings, but our minds will not settle down easily if we are flooded with a constant stream of sense inputs. To cultivate internal seclusion we must create the proper environment for it, and promote wholesome qualities of our hearts and minds. We need to find a time and place best suited to meditation within the constraints of our life circumstances. All the qualities we have been cultivating throughout the course of our meditation—living ethically in accordance with the precepts, balanced effort, ease and

relaxation, and a sense of self-compassion—now come to fruition, arriving to meet us as supporting allies.

Through our many encounters with difficulties in meditation we have learned to set aside sensual desire and craving for pleasure, aversion toward difficult and unpleasant experiences, restlessness, sloth and torpor, and doubt. As we near jhana our mind has become even more quiet and calm. This is called "secluded from unwholesome states" because as we approach jhana our mind is so still that the hindrances cannot arise.

Factors of the First Jhana

The four qualities listed in the definition of the first jhana—rapture, pleasure, thought, and examination—along with a fifth factor identified elsewhere in the source texts, unification of mind, comprise the standard list known as the five jhana factors. All five of these factors are present in the first jhana.

The Pali term *piti*, which is translated here as "rapture," is also translated as "bliss" or "joy." It refers to all the various experiences of samadhi we have been discussing throughout this book, which can appear as bliss or pleasant experiences of energy, light, or sound. As we have emphasized, how rapture manifests itself is highly individual. *Sukha*, translated here as "pleasure," and sometimes as "happiness," refers to these same experiences when they have smoothed out and subside in intensity. Some people have very dramatic experiences of rapture in the first jhana, while for others it is very smooth, even, and calm. The happiness or pleasure of jhana can be thick like honey or, as the jhana progresses, thin out to be very light and sweet.

"Thought and examination" does not refer to thinking in the ordinary sense that we are used to in everyday life. In the first jhana some thoughts can arise, but they are greatly diminished—they are quiet and subtle, and are seen and known as they arise. We are never

lost in or identified with them. Thought and examination here involve unifying the whole mind—bringing all its capacities, including its thinking capacity, together in undistracted awareness. They include directing and sustaining attention to the meditation object. This kind of mental activity is self-sustaining and self-directing, like a gentle guiding or inclining of the mind. In any of the jhanas, though the undistractedness of mind is unshakeable, a slight amount of directing of attention can happen. As factors of jhana, "thought and examination" entail directing this attention to the meditation object so that the mind can be applied to and sustained on that object.

Using stock phrases, as is common in the Pali texts, the jhana definitions are often accompanied by beautiful similes that expand upon and illuminate the meaning. The similes not only complement the description in the definitions, they also explain the way to realize jhana and how to advance through the successive stages.

The simile for the first jhana is:

> He makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Just as a skilled bath man or a bath man's apprentice heaps bath powder in a metal basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water, kneads it till the moisture wets his ball of bath powder, soaks it and pervades it inside and out, yet the ball itself does not ooze; so too, a *bhikkhu* [monk] makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

In the first jhana awareness is deeply immersed in and suffused throughout the body, as clearly expressed in the simile. But though

you are profoundly connected and intimate with the body, the experience of the body is altered from what is accessible through our ordinary sense perceptions. The sense of solidity may give way to subtler sensations of vibration or a sense of the body dissolving away.

The Experience of Jhana

We have seen that the quality and intensity of deepening concentration can manifest in a variety of ways, differing greatly from one person to another. You might experience the jhana factors rapture and pleasure as blissful bodily sensations of energy, vibration, light, or sound. The feelings can be very powerful, pouring over you like a waterfall, or may only be very soft and light.

Meditators sometimes judge their progress solely in terms of the presence of the jhana factors and the absence of the five hindrances. Because jhana is defined by a standard formula, they may believe there are certain milestones to be met, well defined and common for everyone along this path. They may think they are in jhana if rapture and pleasure are strong.

It is a mistake to see the jhana factors as the sole criteria for judging whether or not you have attained the first jhana. Even in the beginning stages of meditation, when concentration is just beginning to blossom, you can feel pleasure. Your mind can be more unified and less distracted. As samadhi strengthens, the jhana factors may become more pronounced, but even in jhana how the factors present themselves is highly individual. We cannot say jhana is marked for everyone by any particular expression of rapture and pleasure. If you have a preconceived idea of what kind of or how much rapture or pleasure you are supposed to have, you may find yourself striving for that. Remember that the stages of jhana are stages of letting go, not of gaining. If you find yourself comparing and judging, try to let it go. You will suffer less and progress faster.

Three Essential Characteristics of Jhana

Jhana is a distinctive state marked by three universal qualities. These three qualities are hallmarks of all four stages of jhana. For anyone in jhana the mind is utterly undistracted and incapable of wandering even for a moment, it is extraordinarily lucid and clear, and the meditation proceeds entirely on its own, with no sense that you are doing anything to sustain it. Whenever these three aspects are present, regardless of the experiences accompanying them, jhana has been reached. If these are not all present and fully developed you cannot call the meditative state jhana.

Unification of Mind

The first quality of jhana is sustained, unbroken mindfulness. An untrained mind tends to be easily distracted, never really settled, and quick to jump from one thing to another. It is striking, and a big relief, when our mind first begins to quiet down in the early development of concentration. Once concentration is very strong, our minds may not wander much—perhaps only for a moment or so, in the deeper stages, before we come back. Perhaps the mind does not wander at all and there is only an impulse for the mind to start to drift or a slight agitation or instability within awareness. Once you are in jhana all of that movement is gone. The mind cannot wander or even have an impulse to wander at all as long as you are in that meditative state.

As autumn gives way to winter, snow can turn into a slushy mixture of water and ice, thicker than liquid, before finally freezing completely. The icy water is undoubtedly freezing, but there is no mistaking slush for solid ice. If your mind can move even a slight amount, you are not in jhana. You may be close, but once in jhana your mind will be immovable in sustained undistractedness.

Though your mind in jhana cannot move from unbroken mindfulness, there remains a part of your mind that *can* move, to incline

your attention in particular directions. This is a very subtle movement. We will explore this in detail later in this chapter and in the next.

Heightened Clarity

The second quality universal to everyone in jhana is increased clarity of mind. Compared to ordinary states of mind, we can see how much more aware we naturally are of subtle aspects of experience when concentration is very strong. Once you have entered jhana, that clarity of awareness is heightened to a whole new level that was previously inaccessible.

You may notice the genesis of thoughts (in the first jhana—thoughts do not arise in the other jhanas), the first impulse for them appearing even before breaking to the surface of consciousness. In jhana your body and mind are tranquilized so that there may not be a lot to experience beyond the jhana factors themselves. But your perception is so clear and bright that you are keenly attuned to whatever does arise. It is like bringing a light to a darkened room. Where you previously could only make out shadows or vague forms, now you see everything in sharp detail.

Self-Sustaining

The third central jhana quality is a sense of self-sustaining. Not only is the mindfulness unbroken, the mind unwavering, but the process of meditation is unfolding on its own without you doing anything to make it happen or keep it going. As concentration builds, meditation starts to feel more effortless. Even in the early stages, meditation feels easier when you are settled and clear compared to the times when your mind is hazy and you cannot focus. The momentum of the concentration carries you and there is not so much you have to do to keep the practice going. You are still putting in some

amount of effort, you still incline your mind to connect with objects of meditation, but with a lighter and lighter touch. Perhaps there is only a slight turning of your attention to connect with your breathing.

In jhana, the sense of having to do anything to maintain the meditation, even on the subtlest levels, is gone. As long as you are in jhana the meditation is completely effortless and self-sustaining.

These three aspects of jhana—the unbroken awareness, the heightened clarity, and the self-sustaining or effortlessness—are common hallmarks for everyone. Along with these there may be other experiences, such as the jhana factors, which can vary greatly from one person to another. Some people may not experience much else besides the sustained clarity and a sense of calm and stillness. For others jhana can be accompanied by very powerful lights, energies, or other blissful experiences.

As you get close to jhana it is important to distinguish between the experiences of concentration—the bliss, light, or energy—and the undistracted clarity itself. Deepening stages of samadhi and jhana are not stages of gaining new experiences, but stages of letting go. Some people become caught up in or fascinated with these dramatic experiences. But ultimately they all drop away, especially when you get to the third and fourth jhanas, leaving only the clear, bright mind. Be aware of how the jhana factors are arising for you, but mostly stay attuned and interested in the three main qualities that will help you attain and then advance through the progressive, subtler stages of jhana.

How to Attain Jhana

Meditators will sometimes wonder: *Is this jhana?* You can be sitting right on the doorstep and not know. You cannot know how close you are until you have made the transition and see what it looks like on

the other side. Once you enter jhana, there is no longer any doubt. Once you cross the threshold, you access a degree of steadiness and self-continuation that is striking, a qualitative shift to an entirely new level of clarity, steadiness, and self-sustained presence.

Maturing of Right Effort

Sensing they are close to jhana but unable to take hold of it, people can sometimes become more frustrated or impatient. Agitation can feed back onto itself, pulling you out of concentration and causing even more aggravation as any remnants of clarity and calm melt away.

Nonclinging is the fruit of dharma practice, but is also the way forward itself. By remembering to meet your meditation with an experimental attitude, a willingness to stay present and learn what works and what does not, you have gained wisdom and skill. From all the times you kept sitting through worry, frustration, or pain you have developed the capacity for patience. Kindness for ourselves, discernment, and mindfulness are all essential for attaining jhana. But these qualities are not merely tools to aid us in our journey. The wholesome qualities we have been developing to reach jhana are their own reward; they are themselves the fruit of our practice. Embracing an attitude of the path as the goal supports us to relax and be at ease, makes the qualities of a liberated mind come alive for us now, and offers the fastest way toward realizing jhana.

If you have never played the piano, you would not expect to have any skill at it. But by just beginning, though you have no ability whatsoever, your playing will improve. The same is true in meditation. By applying yourself, doing the best you can, you move from tenuous first steps to competence and skill. Reflect on and acknowledge what you have learned. You have put in time and energy, sitting when you were inspired and carrying on when you didn't want to, through all the ups and downs, and you are learning how to do it.

Entering the First Jhana

Entering jhana happens on its own. You cannot make it happen. The stages of jhana are not progressive stages of doing or gaining; they are deepening levels of letting go and simplifying the mind. We cannot force the blossoming of jhana any more than we can force a flower to open—the very act of trying is too much mental activity for the mind to settle down completely. But while we cannot force a flower to open, we can provide everything the flower needs to blossom. Similarly, there are things we can do to facilitate the process of jhana, and to create the conditions necessary for the mind to drop into jhana when it is ready.

Stay aware of how much effort you are making and in what directions your effort is aimed. Like the Buddha, we can learn this skill if we apply ourselves with patience. The key to doing this is not complicated. Just carry on with the simple form of connecting with your body breathing and let the process continue to unfold.

Use the breath as skillful means in support of letting go. Do not try to press or force yourself to attain jhana, or any other state of meditation. Pushing is counterproductive because it is too much doing, too much activity, when what we want is for the mind to settle, not do. Try to let go of your struggles and let go of clinging to pleasure. Simply attend wisely to whatever is happening moment by moment. Practicing in this way aims us toward jhana with a relaxed attitude that does not overstrive and allows the experiences of samadhi to develop organically.

You still have to make some amount of effort until you are in jhana, but it becomes an ever lighter touch until finally you have let go completely as the stream of samadhi carries you. You put in the work, make the effort toward building momentum, and then let the meditation's own power engage and take off.

You will know if you are striking the right balance between effort and letting go by paying attention to what happens as the momentum

builds. If you are making too much effort, you may feel more agitation rather than more peace. Notice if you feel tense or tight or restless. Drop back and let go so that the momentum can take over. Shift from doing to feeling yourself being pulled in.

Similarly, notice what happens when you let go too soon. See if your mind wanders or moves more. If you let go too much before you are ready, you will feel yourself lifting out of the meditation. You will not be as concentrated. If this happens, bring back the effort and intention to direct the process more.

As the jhana factors strengthen, some teachers will advise letting go of the breath and shifting your attention solely to the pleasant aspect of your experience itself as your meditation object in order to bring you into jhana. However you are experiencing rapture and pleasure, connect with the pleasure itself as your meditation object. This may be helpful for some people and you can try it, but pay attention to what happens if you do.

Sometimes letting go into the pleasant feeling can help bring us further in, while for others staying with the breath works best. In any case, you cannot turn away from the breath and place your attention on pleasantness too soon or else you will lift out of the samadhi. By taking your attention away from the meditation object too early and putting it onto the pleasantness itself, you can feel yourself lifting out. You will not be as deeply concentrated. In this case bring your attention back to the samadhi-breath or the samadhi suffused throughout the body or whatever other meditation object you may have, letting go into that experience to take you deeper. You have to stay attuned and see what works best for you.

In previous chapters I discussed how, as concentration deepens, we can head in one of two directions, either more deeply immersed in body awareness or disconnected from consciousness of our body. Stay attuned to how the process is unfolding. As long as you have a sense of being connected with your body, though it may be quite

subtle, continue practicing as you have been, either more narrowly focused in the area of the breath or opened up to the whole body. This will be your doorway into jhana.

If you feel like you are becoming disconnected from your body, then this is the time to intentionally turn your awareness into the body and, making as much effort as necessary but no more, suffuse the experiences of samadhi throughout your body. Let that be your doorway into jhana.

Recall the simile for the first jhana:

> He makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Just as a skilled bath man or a bath man's apprentice heaps bath powder in a metal basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water, kneads it till the moisture wets his ball of bath powder, soaks it and pervades it inside and out, yet the ball itself does not ooze; so too, a bhikkhu [monk] makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

What is the bath man doing in this simile? He is making soap. He is combining water and bath powder, mixing and kneading them together until you no longer have two separate things. You have just the one thing, soap. Water and powder have unified into something new.

In precisely the same way, you make the rapture and pleasure, however you experience them, born of seclusion "drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body." You are bringing them into the body. This is a very clear, precise, and accurate description of what happens.

Rapture and pleasure suffused throughout the body is both the way into jhana and the nature of the state of the first jhana. You have been staying with the breath and now the instructions have changed. Notice there is no mention of the breath in the definition of jhana. The breath has done its job and now awareness has spread throughout the whole body. The meditator makes the rapture and pleasure drench, steep, fill, and pervade the body. You are consciously bringing it into the body if it is not happening on its own.

Entry into jhana is marked by an absorption into the rapture and pleasure suffused through the body. We are immersed in it. It permeates and soaks every part of us. For some, when the mind is ready it will drop into jhana of its own accord. Others may need to purposefully suffuse the samadhi experiences throughout the body, just as described in the simile. Stay with the process if it suffuses on its own, and guide it; suffuse it throughout the body if you need to.

Stabilizing Jhana

When you first touch jhana you may only stay in it for a short time before you are lifted right out. You may not know how you got in, how to stay in, or how to find your way back. Remember patience and try your best to let go of struggle or of trying to force the process. With time and experience you will find the way to jhana more consistently. As you take your time with each jhana, you will get to know it and learn how to move in and out of it.

As you begin to stabilize in jhana, you can hang out there and check out what it is like. How do you experience jhana? Is the rapture strong or light, edgy or smooth? Are there any thoughts? Notice the part of your mind that is unmoving and the part you can incline to investigate your experience. With only the barest, lightest touch, examine and get to know the surroundings. Do not be in a hurry. Without trying to get to the second jhana, spend some time noticing how things unfold.

Progressing Through the Jhanas

We move through the jhanas either by doing nothing and letting the process unfold on its own, or by doing something and engaging in the process of letting go.

For some, once the first jhana has been attained, progression happens on its own. If moving through the jhanas is going to happen on its own, you will feel yourself dropping down into deeper states. Whether the progression happens in a single sitting or over the course of months, you will not have to do anything and your mind will naturally settle, moving to the second jhana and beyond. Others may turn their minds toward simplifying and letting go to progress further. This can be a sense of letting go of the coarser experiences of the present jhana or of leaning into the subtler experiences of the next.

Directed Attention

The use of directed attention may be important for some people in order to progress through the jhanas, just as it was important throughout our meditation leading up to jhana. I have been emphasizing that, once in jhana, awareness is so stabilized there is not a sense of doing anything to keep the process going. The mind is undistracted and unmoving, and because it is absorbed in a steady awareness you cannot make mental effort in the ordinary sense. As you are carried with the unfolding progression, there is no sense of any activity on your part making it happen.

But even in the still places of meditative absorption and jhana there remains a part of the mind that can be inclined in certain directions. It sounds paradoxical that the mind is unmoving yet there is some part that *can* move, that our awareness can be directed somehow.

This is a subtle place in the meditation. A slight amount of knowing and directing of attention remains. The inclination of awareness is extremely delicate, but because your perception is so keen you do not need much other than a subtle awareness.

Second Jhana

> With the stilling of thought and examination, he enters and abides in the second jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, and accompanied by inner composure and singleness of mind, without thought and examination.

The stars are always above us, but are obscured by the sun's brilliance by day. Only when the sun sets do the stars reveal themselves, coming to prominence in a powerful display against the night sky. The subtler features of jhana emerge as the coarser qualities fall away. This pattern will characterize progress through each of the jhanas.

The second jhana is more quiet and still than the first. The thought and examination of the first jhana have fallen away, rapture and pleasure remain, and other qualities, inner composure and singleness of mind, begin to emerge.

In the first jhana there can be some thoughts. With the stilling of thought and examination, the verbal process of thinking settles as you enter a wordless realm. The connecting and sustaining function of thought and examination is no longer necessary and drops away. Your awareness just *is* connected and sustained without the necessity of any mental function to sustain it. Inner composure and singleness of mind become more prominent as we find ourselves in a quieter, simpler place.

Listen to the simile for the second jhana:

> He makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration. Just as though there were a lake whose waters welled up from below and it had no inflow from east, west, north or south and would not be replenished from time to time by showers of rain, then the cool fount of water welling up in the lake would make the cool water drench, steep, fill, and pervade the lake, so that there would be no part of the whole lake unpervaded by cool water; so too, a bhikkhu [monk] makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration.

Notice the shift from the first to the second jhana in the description of what happens. Just as in the first jhana, the rapture and pleasure drench, steep, fill, and pervade the body, but the image is different. To get to the first jhana we are working and kneading, like the bath man, putting in some amount of effort to suffuse the rapture and pleasure throughout the body. The precise amount of effort varies for each of us, depending on how the process unfolds on its own, but there is some sense of directing the process.

Now, in the second jhana, the process of suffusing throughout the body is still happening, but it is coming from a deeper place. It feels a lot quieter. Instead of the external effort and energy of the bath man, the infusion is welling up deep from within out of the momentum and concentration of the first jhana.

Take some time and get to know what the second jhana is like. Notice the wordless quality—you will not be thinking thoughts about having no thoughts. This is a nonverbal knowing. Notice the sense of inner composure and the undistracted singleness of mind.

Third Jhana

The third jhana is similar to the second, except it feels even smoother and more refined as rapture fades, leaving only pleasure:

> With the fading away of rapture, he abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware, feeling pleasure with the body, he enters and abides in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare: "equanimous and mindful he abides in pleasure."

At some point the rapture we previously suffused throughout the body to access the first jhana begins to feel too energetic and coarse. The mind wants to settle further, and rapture gives way to a quieter pleasure in the body and happiness in the mind. For some, the rapture fades on its own as the third jhana begins to reveal itself. If this does not happen for you on its own, try inclining your mind, seeing if you can let go into the feeling of happiness or pleasure, something lighter than the rapture. If you are aware of your breathing, you can use it to help dissipate the rapture if that is strong.

Equanimity, mindfulness, and clear awareness are highlighted in the third jhana's definition. Our consciousness can be so filled by the rapture of the first and second jhanas that we may not notice the stability and clear awareness of our minds. As rapture subsides, mindfulness and equanimity come to prominence.

With attainment of the third jhana, the simile changes quite a bit:

> He makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive, immersed in the water without ever rising out of it, and cool water drenches, steeps and pervades them from their tips to their roots, so there is no part of those lotuses unpervaded by the cool water, so too,

> a bhikkhu [monk] makes the pleasure drench, steep and pervade the body.

There is no sense of doing here at all. There is more a sense of being. These lotuses are born, live their entire lives and die completely suffused in the water. They do not have to do anything to make it happen. In the third jhana the pleasure is suffused throughout your body without you doing anything to make it happen. It is a state of being, not of doing.

Fourth Jhana

Here is the definition of the fourth jhana:

> With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth jhana, [which has] neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness and equanimity.

And here is the simile:

> He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind. Just as though a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his whole body not covered by the white cloth; so, too, a bhikkhu [monk] sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind.

With the abandoning of pleasure and pain you enter a state of great balance. There is no sense of doing, only a sense of being, and you just remain there. In the fourth jhana you are powerfully immersed in body awareness, a state of profound connection. With the settling out of rapture and pleasure, perceptions of your body

become quite thin, and what remains is resting at peace in a bright, inclusive, equanimous awareness. Your experience of your body may be subtle; there may not be much to experience in the body at this point as the previous, coarser perceptions melt into vibration or light.

After Jhana

Once we are in any of the stages of jhana, our practice includes times of doing nothing and allowing the experiences and insights to reveal themselves, and times of inclining our minds toward investigation and inquiry. In the next chapter we will explore the various ways insight arises and its place on the path toward the ultimate goal of meditation: awakening and liberation through nonclinging.

As our familiarity with jhana grows, we learn to navigate the terrain, exploring the landscape of consciousness with increasing skill. We gain facility in moving about among the various levels and how to access and use pleasure to gladden our hearts and minds. As we touch the pleasure of concentration, the allure of worldly pleasure fades. A contented heart and mind are subtler, yet more satisfying, than anything that can be found through the ordinary senses. We see that we do not have to go looking outside ourselves. Worldly pleasure loses its attraction as we learn to let go into the more refined pleasure of concentration.

Jhana, like every other experience we can have, is not a reliable place to seek happiness. Though all of the jhanas are highly pleasant, even the purified realm of the fourth jhana contains the seeds of potential suffering. Each jhana has its own level of subtlety and satisfaction, but they all contain a degree of dissatisfaction. From the perspective of the earlier stages in meditation, the first jhana is appealing. From the perspective of the fourth jhana, it can feel rather crude.

By the time you have reached the fourth jhana your mind is keenly aware and you are able to perceive clinging on the subtlest levels. The jhanas are temporarily satisfying, but not ultimately satisfying; and clinging to jhana, or to any meditative state, plants the seeds of suffering.

And so jhana flows us toward awakening. Previously you realized that ordinary worldly pleasure is not fulfilling; now you realize that the pleasure of meditative states is not going to do it for you either. None of these states last, and once the energy of the meditation melts away, we are lifted out and back into the ordinary world. Now there is no turning back. This mind, which is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, flexible, steady, and attained to imperturbability, now turns in a very profound way toward liberation.

Chapter 9

Insight

In the beginning instructions you were advised to find a posture where you could be as comfortable as possible. You could sit in a chair or even lie down, finding whatever best supported you to be relaxed, easeful, and alert. You did not have to make anything happen; all you had to do was be with your experience. By now you have seen how hard this simple notion, just to sit quietly and be present with yourself, can be.

The idea of nonclinging is simple, but one of the first insights we have is that this seemingly straightforward instruction, to be with ourselves, is hard to do. Letting go and nonclinging is easy when things are going your way, but you soon find all the ways you are unable to be present. You begin to uncover layer upon layer of reactive patterns pushing and pulling you in all directions. From all the times of sitting through knee pain or backache, staying with the practice when your mind would not cooperate or when you were visited by old memories or emotional pain, you learned to find moments of freedom in the midst of it all. And you discovered your edges, the places where you were not yet ready or able to let go of struggle, and learned how elusive the happiness of nonclinging can be.

Insight into anything means understanding its true nature. It is an intuitive knowing, direct perception of what is essentially true beyond mere intellectual understanding. To progress from a conceptual understanding of how dharma teachings and practice might help us to actualizing the dharma as a lived reality, we need help to realize the potential for quieting our minds and opening our hearts. We need to find the tools for meeting our self face to face. Through wise discernment we penetrate beneath surface appearances to recognize what is real and true about our world and ourselves.

Whenever you are suffering, it is a signal that you need to back up and look at what is keeping you from being present. And if you cannot be with that, you need to back up again, and keep doing so

until you find what you *can* be present with. Insight is the discernment of your suffering, its cause, and a way to its end in order to more fully realize your capacity for letting go.

Insight is whatever perception or understanding sheds light on the places we create suffering and how to let that suffering go. Sometimes, when the light of awareness illuminates previously hidden corners of our psyche, old destructive patterns can fall away on their own. The grip of self-judgment, criticism, or doubt can loosen simply through mindful presence. Other times, mindful recognition is just the first step, a jumping off point for delving into something more deeply, thinking it through or feeling into it to untangle its knots.

How Insight Leads to Liberation

Just as we suffer in many ways and in many areas of our lives, so there are many forms insight can take. We can directly perceive the ephemeral nature of life through insight into impermanence and change. We can have psychological insights, insights into the nature of our body, and insights into emotions and thought patterns. Insight can manifest as the solution to a problem as we comprehend the web of causal relationships and conditioned patterns influencing our thoughts and behavior. All of these insights can be in service of deepening liberation through nonclinging.

Insights can come on their own as a result of your having calmed your mind, like stilling the wind that ruffles the surface of a lake so you can see the bottom clearly. And you can aim for insights by turning toward any experience to investigate its qualities and how you are relating to what is happening.

You do not have to see farther than you can see. You do not have to know where the process is leading or how to proceed. If you stay

open with and receptive to the process as it unfolds, letting what happens guide you organically and using your best judgment for how to meet it, the way forward will reveal itself.

You can be sitting quietly in meditation and an old memory, long forgotten, may suddenly pop into your mind. By staying present with that memory, you may become aware that there is a feeling associated with it. Or perhaps you have a sense, maybe only a vague feeling, of something lying just below the surface of your consciousness. You might hang out with that feeling or memory, or purposefully turn your attention toward it to look closer. You might then notice a body sensation connected with the feeling or memory, maybe tightness in your belly or shoulders or contraction in your heart, and by staying with the feeling in your body you become aware of an emotion. Looking more closely, you remember a painful time from your childhood when you felt unsafe, and how that unsafe feeling has been simmering beneath the surface of your consciousness to this day.

Insights such as these promote deep psychological healing, revealing and loosening the knots of unconscious forces that drive us. In the same way, insight into thought patterns can help us break unconscious clinging and identity. There is not much to a thought. Thoughts seem to come from nowhere, persist for a moment—floating through the mind like the wisp of a cloud—and are gone. Mundane thoughts about buying groceries or remembering an appointment do not bother us. But as insubstantial as they are, when they are not noticed, thoughts of self-criticism and judgment, views and opinions and self-images—they all generate a world of self-view and suffering that we proceed to inhabit as if it were real.

We can easily mistake our critical, judging mind for wise discernment. We believe our thoughts, not seeing that they are our own creation fueled by unconscious habits and patterns. These destructive attitudes and thoughts would not be so detrimental if we could see them for what they are. This is where we need the clarity of

insight, because it is only through discernment itself that we learn the difference between judging and discernment.

The critical mind is like a computer program, which only knows how to do one thing, the function for which it is programmed. Clicking on the icon for a word processor will never run a video game. When you click on the computer icons in your mind—when you encounter certain people or situations and the right conditions come together—self-judgment, shame, anger, or fear are set in motion, running through the course of their programming.

The critical mind is not interested in giving you an accurate assessment of yourself or others. It is only interested in carrying out its function: to criticize. And it doesn't care what it lands on; it is happy to land on you or anyone else.

You are the expert on the lived experience of your life. But when you identify with your experience, you may be among the least qualified to judge yourself because you cannot see objectively. You are too caught up, too entangled in your own life to assess it properly. Once, with discernment, you see these forces for what they really are—just conditioned patterns that run through their program when set in motion, you do not have to believe them anymore. They begin to lose their grip on you and ultimately fade away completely.

The Ways Insight Arises

Insights come from within jhana and other meditative states, as a direct result of the deeper stages of samadhi. Insights also come during times in meditation when you cannot concentrate, when it feels like the meditation is not going easily or well, or you are dealing with hindrances and learning how to be present with something difficult or painful. And insights come in the experience of daily activities when you are not meditating at all. Meditation practice serves to support all of these.

Three Marks of All Experience

Insight is traditionally understood as directly perceiving one or more of the three characteristics of all experience: impermanence; the ultimately unsatisfactory nature of all things due to their being impermanent; and the selfless nature of your own being.

When we perceive clearly, not as a concept but as part of our lived experience, that things do not last, we tend not to chase after or cling to them so much, knowing that they are just going to change or be lost. Because all things are changing, if you identify with or cling to anything at all—to having or not having any experience, to your body, your mind, or anything that is bound to change—you either suffer or plant the seeds of future suffering. Knowing directly the suffering that comes from clinging because all things are impermanent helps us to let go. When you start to understand more accurately the nature of your mind and body—the fact that in essence you, too, are a collection of changing experiences—you can rest more at peace within the unfolding of your own being.

We may understand all of this very well conceptually, but we do not live our lives as if it were true. This is why it is so important to perceive these characteristics directly. Ignorance and delusion manifest in many ways. We take what must change as lasting. We seek happiness in what is bound to be lost. And we cling to our minds and bodies, even though we know they are destined to old age, illness, and death. If you cling to your youth you suffer. If you are enslaved to your desires, constantly chasing after pleasant experiences and avoiding the unpleasant ones, you suffer—or set yourself up for future suffering.

Have you ever tried to hold water cupped in your hands? No matter how hard you try, it inevitably drips away through your fingers. Pressing your hands and fingers together more tightly does not help; it hurts, and the water is lost nonetheless. Everything is a changing process. Everything will pass away right through your fingers.

This is not meant to make you sullen or disheartened. Life is not a mistake and nothing is going wrong. It's just the way things are. If you release the grip and stop fighting yourself and the world, it relieves the pain. What you are left with is ease.

Very young children immerse themselves in play, creating whole worlds of trucks and trains, dolls and playhouses. They are deeply engaged and absorbed in their imaginations. As they get older the things that had been so enticing no longer hold any fascination. They did not have to do anything to make this happen; their perceptions gradually shifted, simply as a result of a more mature perspective. What had previously captivated their attention no longer seems of interest and simply drops away on its own.

Just as we lose our fascination with childhood toys as we grow older, when we see how things are, as we begin to understand impermanence and the suffering that comes from trying to hold on to anything, our clinging and suffering start to drop away.

The more deeply we really get it, the more we are able to let go of the subtler places of clinging. When your mind is free from clinging, the pain of pressing your fingers together too tightly stops and an inner peace arises as you allow the water to drip through. The happiness of inner peace is subtler than sense pleasure, but more deeply satisfying. This is a place of stillness, of equanimity, and of peace. In order to know the subtler places of clinging, you need mindfulness, clear awareness, and an undistracted, concentrated mind.

Insight That Arises from Within Samadhi

Stages of deep concentration sharpen the mind's perceptive ability. When you become concentrated your mind is less distracted and naturally more clear and aware. And if you take that to the level of jhana, you attain a level of clarity and undistractedness that was

previously inaccessible. Remember what happens in the jhanas. The mind is extremely lucid and undistracted in unbroken mindfulness, with awareness suffused throughout the body.

The more present, awake, and undistracted your mind is, the more clearly it perceives what is most deeply true about your world and yourself: the fact that all conditioned phenomena, all that can be known or sensed, are impermanent and that, as such, they are ultimately unreliable sources of happiness. These insights may come on their own simply as a result of having a concentrated mind, or you can choose to look for these insights within states of samadhi by turning your mind to more deeply investigate and perceive the nature of your body and mind.

Naturally, without your having to do anything, these insights will become clearer. You become increasingly aware of the changing nature of phenomena, recognizing the suffering that comes through clinging, and you come to know more deeply the nature of your heart, mind, and body—the fact that they are also a collection of changing experiences. These insights are great aids in letting go of clinging and helping you rest more equanimously and at peace.

At this stage, the mind has reached a profound degree of clarity in jhana, but things have gotten very still so you have less changing experience to be known by the clear mind. The ability to penetrate into experience has gotten extremely powerful, but the actual experience is so subtle there is not a lot of experience there to penetrate into. The sense of the body can feel quite thin and subtle at this point. You may experience the body dissolving into pure energy or light.

Though it may feel like not much is going on as you rest in the stillness and clarity of mind, you do not need a lot because the power of knowing, seeing, and perceiving is so strong. You penetrate whatever experience there is very clearly and deeply. The characteristics of impermanence and selflessness, the empty nature of the body and

the mind, are all directly experienced as a fruit of a concentrated mind. The insights present themselves.

There may be times in jhana or other deep stages of meditation when you choose to consciously, actively turn your mind toward investigation. I have described the mind in jhana as absorbed and undistracted, but while the mind is steady in unbroken mindful knowing there remains part of the mind that you can incline in certain directions. This is a very subtle pointing of awareness, not the gross movements we are used to in ordinary consciousness. You can look for the changing nature of experience, the cause of suffering through clinging, or the nature of your own being.

Insight in Meditation When You Cannot Concentrate

The times when you cannot concentrate, when you are struggling and it feels like the meditation is falling apart, are important for the cultivation of insight—at least as important as the times of extreme clarity in samadhi, and perhaps more so. Our first instinct is to think we have to get back to the good meditation. We think something is going wrong. But nothing is falling apart and nothing is going wrong. There is simply the arising and passing away of the present moment's experience as it has changed. Where there was peace and happiness, now we experience physical pain or emotional stress.

These are special, important times in meditation and we do not want to miss the opportunity for growth they have to offer. If you want to free yourself from suffering then you have to understand your suffering, and if you want to understand your suffering you have to experience the ways your mind creates suffering. If you want to be free, you would rather see your greed, your hatred, and your delusion than not.

You do not have to seek suffering out; it will find you. And when it does, you should appreciate that it is a necessary and important part of the process of insight and welcome the opportunity to change your relationship with the suffering being presented. Watch your mind when you are struggling or suffering in some way. There is a lot of dharma right there in the places where you get caught. That is the place to look—to learn where you cling and how to let it go. That is how the wisdom and insight come in.

Notice how your mind responds to whatever is happening, whether it is resisting or is buffeting around or being reactive in some other way. Watch what is happening. Come to know the suffering quality of a reacting mind. This is a really important place to pay attention. Pay attention to what you do in those times.

Everything you need for learning and growth is there. You experience the First Noble Truth directly, the suffering that arises because of clinging. The Second Noble Truth is illuminated—the fact that it is your craving that is leading you to cling, craving for pleasant experience and wanting to get rid of unpleasant experience. You directly experience what conditions your mind to cling. Everything you need to learn about suffering, its cause, and its cessation presents itself. And you find out whether or not you are yet skillful enough to let go.

Try not to judge the benefit of meditation just by how pleasant or unpleasant it is. Meditation is like riding a bicycle. Think about what it is like riding a bike: You go up and down the hills. Going up can hurt and not be much fun. Going down the hills feels great; you feel the wind and it is easy and pleasant. It feels better going down, but which one do you get the most out of? You get a lot going down from the pleasure and the beauty, but it is the uphill that builds up your endurance and your legs the most.

The path of meditation is sometimes called the path of purification. As you turn your attention inward, connecting deeply and intimately with yourself, parts of you that may have been hidden or

covered over begin to be made conscious. Simply by cultivating steady presence, the practice actually brings them up in cycles of purity and purification, and this process only accelerates as you become more collected and settled. In this way, the path of insight and the path of concentration are the same path.

You will enter the deeper stages of samadhi and then will go through cycles or times when it is not so easy, when you do not have the support of the concentration. Rather than react with and push away those experiences, you need to use those times. They serve to unmask levels of clinging you may not have been aware of. You get to find out how you can be with this unpleasant experience and if you can find a way to let go of your suffering around it.

When the hindrances are strong and you cannot find your breath, your ability to work with what is happening can feel feeble, as if you are not really able to practice. It is true that in those times you may not have the strength of clarity and steadiness. But you are practicing fully and well as long as you bring your mindful attention *the best you can* to meet your experience. Just do the best you can; that is enough. Think of how you get good at anything. It is through practice and experience. Learning happens through the struggle; your ability to let go will grow.

Insight in Daily Life

There can be a tendency to view daily life practice as somehow less important than formal meditation. You may think the real benefits come mainly through exceptional states of deep samadhi, but the insights that come in daily life are at least as important as those from the subtle stages of concentration, and perhaps even more so.

There are so many opportunities for insight. You get to find out how you are in relationship to the people at work, family, neighbors, and friends. You get to see when you are able to move through life

with a balanced mind and what causes you to close off from situations or people. As you find what helps you live in a balanced way and learn how to let go, there is no disconnection between meditation and any other aspect of your life.

As the fruits of meditation carry into your life you start to notice thoughts and feelings previously covered over by busyness or distraction. It can be alarming when you first begin to wake up to what is really happening in your mind. You begin to see how much of your thoughts are some version of *Am I okay?* or *How am I going to be okay?* or *How am I going to get this?* or *How am I going to avoid that?* By bringing the mindfulness and clear awareness you have been cultivating in formal meditation into ordinary life, it becomes clear how much of your life you spend in peace and fulfillment and how much time is marked by worry or stress.

Dharma practice seeks to shift reactive patterns of grasping and aversion. When your habitual tendencies of chasing your likes and running from your dislikes begin to loosen, you are left to rest peacefully within the ever-changing flow of your life. In order to do this you must come to understand these patterns, and to understand them you have to experience them.

If you want to free yourself from suffering, you need to understand the forces that create suffering responses to life. But you cannot see your conditioning directly. In order to understand these patterns you have to bring them into the light of awareness, and that only happens when the proper neural pathways are activated. The seeds of your reactive habits lie dormant, waiting for the opportunity to sprout when you encounter challenging people, places, and situations. Only under the right circumstances, when certain causes and conditions come together, do they spring forth and grow.

Many of these tendencies only have an opportunity to become conscious in the course of daily activities. You can be sitting in meditation, heart open and mind quiet, happily unbothered by anything

because you are secluded from the stresses of your normal interactions. Then you get up from meditation to begin your day and encounter a person you dislike or hear a news story that upsets you.

You gain valuable insights into the ways you fall into reactivity or where your heart closes off, opening you to the possibility of freedom. See them as the opportunity for learning how to live in equanimity with a peaceful mind and an open heart.

Chapter 10

Equanimity

The entire teaching of the Buddha can be viewed as making a radical shift in how we seek happiness—a shift that has far-reaching and profound consequences for our well-being. This process of transforming our relationship with our life and ourselves culminates in a mind of inner peace and nonreactive presence, a state of equanimity.

Without equanimity we tend to meet situations through unseen filters of reactivity, causing us to deny our experience or pull away from anything we dislike or chase after what we want. When you are balanced you neither push away nor cling; you don't suppress your feelings or thoughts, but you also don't get caught in or identified with them. Between reactions of grasping and aversion lies the freedom to choose your own way, how you will relate and respond to life.

Equanimity is both the path and the fruit of the path. You employed equanimity the first time you sat to meditate as you tried to let go of grasping and aversion and sit quietly with yourself. You may have felt tenuous and unsteady, but you did the best you could and it was enough. Through those initial efforts equanimity matured and your capacity for meeting your experience grew. As you became increasingly able to turn toward and work with whatever arose in meditation, mindfulness and steadiness grew.

It can seem so hard to live with a peaceful mind, an open heart, and compassion for others and ourselves. Equanimity acts as an ally, support, and shield against the "eight worldly concerns" of gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain. These four pairs of opposites are powerful incentives driving most human behavior. We are constantly judging and comparing ourselves and our situations. You can appreciate success, but if your sense of well-being depends on it you are setting yourself up for disappointment when the situation changes. If you are attached to honor and approval, it may feel good until you are faced with criticism. If you become egotistical, your self-worth can be based on

comparing yourself to others. The more deeply you identify with your successes, the more profoundly you will identify with failure.

With equanimity you remain unshaken. Your peace and happiness are not left to chance forces outside your control and you remain independent, gliding over the bumps of life's ups and downs.

Equanimity should not be mistaken for passivity. It does not mean you are no longer engaged in life or should stop trying to change your circumstances when appropriate. But you should do all this from wisdom, not from reactivity. If you think you are supposed to stay with something when it really is too much to deal with, you fall into struggle.

An acorn will eventually grow into a great oak tree, able to withstand powerful storms. When the sapling is small it is weak and vulnerable, so one builds a fence to protect it and guard against animals or wind. There is no need for a fence once the tree has matured. Until equanimity is well developed, you are more easily blown by the winds of bother or stress. As wisdom grows and your boundary point moves out, your heart and mind can rest freely in the midst of ever more turmoil. Until then you must find a way to back off or bring down the intensity to within a range in which you can work.

Stress can be defined as the gap between your experience and your ability to be fully present in the midst of that experience without struggle. The wider the gap, the more you suffer. Equanimity means closing the gap. We create suffering through our inability to be with life as it is, and through our aversion to unpleasant, unwanted experiences. There is no problem if we do not think life is supposed to be any way other than it is.

The Buddha expressed this using an analogy. He said both the ordinary and the enlightened person experience the full range of physical and mental processes, all the pleasant and unpleasant feelings available through the senses. Both experience the unpleasantness of painful physical sensations, which the Buddha likened to

being struck by an arrow. The ordinary person then creates another extra layer of suffering, in addition to the painful experience itself, by clinging to the pleasant or fighting against the unpleasant. This, said the Buddha, is like being struck by a second arrow, whereas the enlightened person, for whom there is no gap, is struck only once.

Ending Destructive Impulses

The equanimity of the Buddha is described as a destruction of three fundamental forces that lead to reactivity and stress. When these deeply conditioned patterns are no longer operational, you will have arrived in a state of balance and inner peace beyond any method or technique.

These three tendencies of mind are closely related and reinforce each other. The first of these is ignorance, not understanding the truth of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation: the Four Noble Truths. The insight into suffering that dispels ignorance is beyond mere intellectual understanding; it is an immediate knowing that manifests moment by moment within the reality of your life.

When immersed in our pursuits we cannot see the tension or anxiety that may be right in front of us. We experience a lack, a sense of something missing, or we are unable to let go of our aversion to whatever is difficult or painful. Always seeking satisfaction in the next great experience, we are so caught we cannot see the stress inherent in looking for happiness outside our self. It is due to ignorance that we do not perceive the suffering inherent in giving our well-being over to whether or not our experience is to our liking. Once we begin to wake up more fully to what is happening, to what is right in front of us, we directly experience the clinging that comes from craving, and the suffering that ensues.

The second tendency that destroys equanimity, seeking happiness by fulfilling sense pleasures, comes directly from ignorance. There is little or nothing we do that is not an effort to increase pleasant feelings and to decrease or avoid unpleasant feelings. This fundamental motivating force to seek happiness and avoid pain is deeply ingrained in our conditioning.

It may seem counterintuitive that seeking happiness by fulfilling desires does not work in the long term and, in fact, creates precisely the suffering we are trying to avoid. But gratifying desire rarely delivers its promise of happiness. It may elevate us momentarily to a state of satisfaction and contentment—certainly there can be the immediate pleasure of fulfilling desire—but once the initial excitement or pleasure wears off, we are left back in our usual, ordinary state of mind.

Desires seduce us by their promise of happiness, by the anticipation that by satisfying them we will feel more fulfilled. We believe that if we could only discover the right things to go after, and then apply ourselves properly to the task of getting them, we could attain some sort of enduring happiness that until now has escaped us.

In addition to making our happiness dependent upon circumstance and creating, at best, a temporary happiness destined to change, seeking happiness by fulfilling desire conditions the mind for further craving. The objects of our desire can be difficult to secure; once acquired they often provide less pleasure or happiness than expected; and when clung to they cause us grief when conditions inevitably change. Then, feeling empty or in need, we are once again driven to repeat the cycle.

How many desires have you filled and how often have you filled them, only to have them return, putting you on a constant treadmill, always having to satisfy them again? Alleviating the cravings associated with desire by fulfilling desire is like drinking seawater to alleviate thirst: it can be a great relief for a short while, since for the time being it eases the suffering inherent in craving, but it has the more

fundamental effect of conditioning the mind to crave more. We are satiated for a while until the next craving, often for the same object or experience of the previous desire.

The third force aiming us away from equanimity is called "becoming." It is the drive to be something. It is not that you need to stop having a mind, a body, and a personality. It is *having* to be something, and clinging to an identity through which you judge and compare yourself to others, that plants the seeds of suffering.

Just as the potential for sense pleasure to bring lasting happiness is limited, clinging to an identity is not a reliable way to inner peace. If you are identified with your youth, you suffer when youth and beauty fade. If you are identified with your achievements, job title, or role, or to the opinions of others, your peace of mind is in the hands of forces outside your control.

You do not have to stop living. You can continue to be involved with those things that bring you meaning—work life, family or friends, creative expression, and involvement in the affairs of the world. The shift is in your priorities, where you look for meaning and happiness, and in the motivating principles upon which your life is based. As you move forward in life, to the extent you are consumed by your goals and bound up in having to have them, your happiness and well-being are dependent upon them and you will suffer when they are not realized or when the situation inevitably changes.

With a mind of equanimity, you find the balance between being connected and engaged in your life without clinging to any of it.

Becoming Disentangled

Equanimity is often misunderstood as being a state of indifference. We may think we are supposed to be detached witnesses removed from the concerns of others or the world. But equanimity does not

mean being numb or untouched by anything, or that no feelings can arise.

Equanimity means remaining poised and centered within whatever happens. The ability to let go has nothing to do with being unfeeling or unconcerned about others, and everything to do with meeting life with balance and composure.

The ability to let go comes through disenchantment and dispassion. Disenchantment can carry a negative connotation, conveying a sense of being disappointed or let down. If people invested time and effort into something and it did not work out, we may say they gave up and moved on to a new endeavor because they became disenchanted or disillusioned.

But disenchantment does not mean disappointment. It means to be free from enchantment. To be disillusioned does not mean to be let down. It is to be no longer caught in illusion. In the old fairy tales when a sorcerer casts a spell people become enchanted. They no longer have a sense of reality and are enmeshed in a spellbound world of confusion. Once the spell is broken and they are no longer enchanted, they see the world as it really is. Only then have they reconnected with reality.

Similarly, dispassion can connote a feeling of impassivity or indifference. But dispassion does not mean you are detached from yourself or those around you. If you are passionate about something or someone you are tied to them with strong emotions or desires. You are not only interested or committed; you are swept up in the intoxicating allure of those emotions and desires. To be dispassionate means you are no longer ruled by the passions or caught up emotionally. If you say to loved ones that you are detached from them, it probably is not going to be received very well. If you tell them you are not clinging to them, they will probably appreciate it.

Humans are hardwired to attach. It is built into our DNA. Infants must attach to a primary caregiver or they will not thrive.

Healthy attachment is an essential part of early childhood development, and those with ambivalent attachment as children may find it hard to form satisfying relationships as adults, or may face other psychological or emotional issues.

We are not aiming to disconnect. In fact, we are doing the opposite—connecting with our bodies and minds profoundly, beyond the surface appearance normally accessible. Reflect on how you have been meditating. You close your eyes and draw your attention inward. You cultivate mindfulness and concentration, and turn that clear, undistracted awareness directly toward connecting deeply with your body and mind.

An equanimous mind is open to all of life, including all parts of you. It does not suppress anything. By now you have seen how beautiful your mind can be, and you may also have touched places within that you wished were not there. There is no experience you are supposed to have or not have. This is a path of connecting with yourself, deeply and profoundly, but remaining *disentangled* in the midst of it all.

Many people find that as equanimity matures they are more interested in the lives of others and the world around them than ever before. When you are not consumed by the eight worldly concerns, you are not preoccupied with yourself. When you are not reacting to a situation, you are able to be more present and connected, not less. Rather than feeling detached, you find yourself able to open to and be present with all sorts of situations and people. A mind of equanimity is not consumed with what it can get, but is deeply interested in what it can give.

Factors Supporting Equanimity

The dharma qualities that support and grow from meditation are like sides of a multifaceted jewel, each reflecting and magnifying

light from all the other surfaces, the rays feeding back on each other in a positive reinforcing cycle. Any one of them is an access point for the others.

Intention

All along we have emphasized the central role intention plays in the course of dharma practice. Especially in those times when you are pulled by forces of desire, negativity, or doubt, keeping in mind wholesome intentions for how you want to live and act provides a refuge, helping you stay balanced through the many challenges and rewards of a meditative life. Rather than being caught up and swept along by a situation, the clarity of your intention acts as a touchstone, anchoring you in wise and skillful action.

Virtue

All of your actions are born from intentions, whether you are aware of them or not. Out of your sincere, wholesome intentions comes virtuous action. By aiming to live with integrity you dwell peacefully with others, and when your interactions are harmonious your mind is not agitated by conflict. This leads to a quiet confidence in knowing there is a blameless quality to your life.

Gladdening Your Mind

Living virtuously in alignment with your intentions, you are more happy and at peace. It is reassuring to know you are on a positive track, using your time well by aiming to create less suffering and more well-being for others and yourself. You feel the goodness of your intentions and the happiness of knowing you have put those intentions into action. Being reassured leads to relaxation and ease, and

when you are at ease, not stressed or worried, you feel a sense of balance and calm.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness provides a space between what happens and your response to it. Within that space rests the freedom to decide whether you will react on impulse or respond through wisdom. It is a moment of choice in the midst of any situation. With mindfulness, when equanimity is present you know it. When you are thrown off balance you know that, and can employ the tools you have built to help you regain composure.

Steadiness

As concentration becomes established, equanimity is not so easily shaken. Concentration strings moments of mindfulness together. You can go for long periods caught up in life, going through the motions unaware of what you are doing. But if you maintain a state of steady undistractedness throughout the day, you become increasingly awake to the present moment.

Discernment

Supported by mindfulness and steadiness, you begin to see things as they are without getting caught up in stories about them. You have the experience to choose the appropriate tools and apply them skillfully in any situation. As patterns of reactivity are recognized through mindfulness and steady presence, the knots of aversion and stress, desire and attachment, begin to unravel. You are naturally open to more happiness, contentment, compassion, wisdom, and peace.

Finding the Teacher Within

Regardless of your situation, you can begin cultivating a quiet mind and an open, compassionate heart. With intention you can start to use your time more wisely for mindfully connecting with your experience in order to explore the potential for freedom within your life circumstances. With practice you begin, bit by bit, to awaken to and live more fully in alliance with your own inner wisdom.

There comes a time when you are no longer a seeker. You will have arrived at a place of knowing and being, the confluence of the path and the goal.

This is not an egotistical place, in which you think you have learned all there is to know and no one can tell you anything. It is not saying there is no longer a path to follow or no further work to be done. We cannot see our own blind spots. It would be a mistake to think you never need the guidance and advice of those who have traveled further along the path. We do not want to become arrogant or complacent, thinking we do not need mentors. Otherwise we risk running into unnecessary cul-de-sacs or bad neighborhoods that would be better avoided altogether.

Ultimately, we go from being students to becoming our own teacher. As the dharma comes alive in you, you will have less need to rely on any outside authority. With time and experience you will learn to trust your own inner guidance. Your experience will be your guide. The times, in any situation, when you clearly know what is happening and it is obvious what to do, will increase. You will not need to look outside of yourself.

The person who splashes in the shallows of the ocean does not find the pearls. If you want to understand you have to dive deeply, and then you will find them. Through meditation you open to the deeper truths of yourself and the world around you. You go from being a seeker to resting in the stream of knowing and being, as you learn to live equanimously with a quiet mind and an open heart.

Richard Shankman has been a meditator since 1970, and teaches at Dharma centers and groups internationally. He is guiding teacher of the Metta Dharma Foundation, and cofounder of the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies and of Mindful Schools. Shankman is author of *The Experience of Samadhi*.

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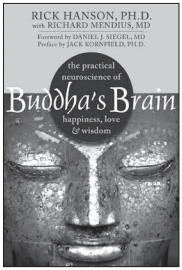

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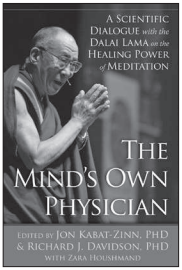
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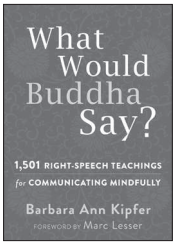
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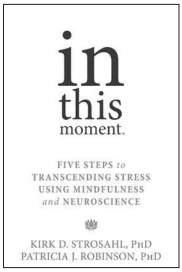
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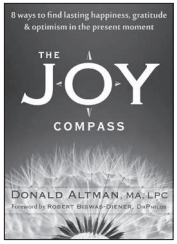

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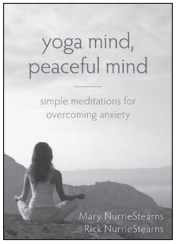

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